

Soul to Soul
Deconstructing Deficit Thinking in the Classroom

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Abstract

This thesis explores educator beliefs, attitudes and practices in teaching First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Ethnic students in Canada, including Muslim and Arabic students. Research supports evidence of on-going systemic racism toward the First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and New Canadians in society, and therefore, within our schools and our classrooms. Evidence also exists regarding how racism, invisibly instilled in educators as societal norms, permeates classrooms and helps continue to perpetuate marginalization and Othering of students.

The research question was: How can teachers begin to deconstruct Euro-Centric, White Dominant beliefs, practices, attitudes and expectations in order to positively impact *all students* and their academic well-being?

I examine the questions: What are some teachers doing which positively impacts learning for all students? What can be done to help teachers realize that some of their teaching practices and ways of dealing with students are disrespectful to the individual children and contribute to systemic racism?

Keywords: racism, anti-oppressive education, White Dominant Society, critical race theory, deficit thinking, social justice.

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Chapter One

My Journey to Awareness

Shifts of Consciousness and Enlightenment

Until recently, I could not name or talk about White Dominant Culture, White Privilege and Euro-Centric beliefs and practices. However, I could talk about low teacher expectations for First Nation, Métis, Inuit and Ethnic students. The term ‘Ethnic’ students, or New Canadian students includes Muslim, Arabic, and other students recently immigrating to Canada. They very often come into the classroom unable to speak English, and steeped in their own countries’ cultural beliefs and ways of dressing. I could talk about how low teacher expectations were centered around a generalized, false belief that the students were somehow incapable of learning and succeeding academically. I could also talk about the erroneous belief that the parents of the students were somehow to blame for their lack of educational initiative. I could talk about how some teachers have a belief system and practices in their classrooms which hurt Indigenous and New Canadian students rather than empowering them. I could talk about how some teachers' use of outdated teaching practices is very confining and restrictive to student learning and engagement, especially for the First Nations, Métis, Inuit and New Canadian students. These teaching practices cause students to disengage in school and disconnect from learning.

Although I could not talk about Social Justice or Social Action, I could talk about how I was different in welcoming all students, no matter their skin colour, into my classroom, where we worked together, forming a positive learning community which invited student input and success. I could talk about setting high expectations for my students, and *then working with them* to find ways to engage them in learning. I could talk about observing these students taking a long time – often months - to finally become engaged and empowered, as I actively searched for the ways and means to engage them in learning. I could talk about the joy I felt for them as they finally began to believe in themselves, find

some confidence, and trust me enough to take a chance, to risk trying and participating, and ultimately, to learn. I could talk about how most of the students with varying backgrounds were engaged, enjoyed learning and were academically successful in my class. I could talk about the most important thing of all, celebrating with them as they became confident in themselves, as learners and as people.

As a professional development leader, I could talk about how I worked with other professional leaders, trying to find ways to help other teachers who seemed to be stuck in their antiquated teaching methods, and who did not see that they were marginalizing students. I did not have the vocabulary to label what I was seeing for what it is – systemic, on-going racism - nor what I was doing as a form of social justice and social action which was making a positive impact for many of the students in my class. I did not feel that I was doing anything special or different than what should always happen in a classroom – that of engaged and joyous learning *where students feel validated, valued and successful*.

In truth, in a perfect educational world, classrooms would operate in this manner for the benefit of all. It was not until I embarked on this learning journey that I began to be able to name things for what they are: White Dominant, Euro-Centric practices within our classrooms and our schools which continue to support white students while harming our Indigenous and New Canadian students.

As a White Privileged member of Canadian society, I have had a number of shifts in consciousness - defining moments - which have helped me understand that people are people. I also realize that the colour of a person's skin *should not* limit him or her in any way, in society or in the classroom. These shifts of consciousness have helped set my feet on the journey of researching and writing about un-covering racial practices, attitudes and beliefs in the classroom. It is because of these shifts in consciousness that I began to learn very early in life to turn my own lens inward in order to fight the invisible blinders of White Privilege. This, in turn, helped me develop positive, genuine and respectful relationships with all the people in my life, including my students.

This does not mean that I am impervious to the deeply rooted White Dominant Discourse and ways of our society. Because I am White, I benefit from White Privilege on a daily basis. I have to be on my toes to guard against falling into the ‘norms’ of our society. I need to remind myself that the world does not operate in fair ways and it is up to me to do what I can to change this. Respectful treatment for all has always been important to me because people are people – no one should be considered higher or lower than anyone else. I have always wanted to be able to give my students the best of everything I had to offer, because it is right and just – the only thing to do. This is the way the world *should* operate. But usually it does not. And sometimes individuals - people like me - figure things out that are much bigger and more complex than they realize. Sometimes they can and do do something with their realizations – other times, though, they do not. Here are two such realizations that have happened in my life – I call them Soul-moments.

Soul-moment number one. Before my mother was married, in 1957, she grew up in Flint, Michigan and went to live in Detroit, attending the Salvation Army church and working for the church. By this time she was 28, and probably felt she was getting too old for marriage. She probably thought that she would be alone and single for the rest of her life. Her work was with children, and she met and fell in love with an eight-year old black child – a boy named Eddie. It was love at first sight for both of them, I was told by my mother’s sisters many years later. My mother was determined that she would adopt this child. He felt the same way about her, following her around and just wanting to be near her. My mother began asking how to legally adopt Eddie.

My grandparents heard of this and sent my mother's older sisters to intervene. (My mother could be very stubborn, so I don't know how they convinced her, but they did). I know that they pressed upon her the era and society in which she lived – the 1950s in Detroit – a city which had much in the way of racial tension, racism and segregation. Whatever changed her mind, she walked away

from the adoption, and the young boy, and I wonder how she felt about that.

I didn't learn of this until long after my mother had died, and I had no one to ask. It happened before she met my father, and he didn't know much about it. It was as if her family decided to keep this a family secret. I wonder sometimes though, what would life have been like for her and Eddie? Would my father have married her and accepted a black child as his, back in 1960? I wonder too, would I have had a big brother? A big brother who was black? What would that have been like for our family, living in the middle of racial strife in Detroit in the early 1960s? I also wonder, what happened to Eddie when the woman he loved as a mother, basically abandoned him? (My mother never talked about Eddie. I never heard her once mention his name).

This family story showed me that people are people, and we love whom we love, and skin colour doesn't matter – it's about what's in the heart. However, it also showed me that societal pressures are often too strong to fight alone, and sometimes we abandon our hopes and our loved ones.

Soul-moment number two. My parents both eventually became Salvation Army Officers or ministers, and married. I was born in a small town in Michigan, about 200 miles southwest of Detroit, at their first church. My parents were good at what they did; they really believed in being Christian and living a 'good' life. They took the teachings of the Bible to heart and lived them. My parents were transferred from Hillsdale to a suburb of Detroit, called Highland Park, and at five years old, I learned about prejudice.

The church my parents were assigned to sat on the boundary of a white-middle class neighbourhood and a predominantly black area. One day a group of young black men – teenagers – went to see my father at the church, and asked if they could play basketball in the church gymnasium. My father, always inclusive and inviting, gladly let the black teenagers into the gym on an almost daily basis. Pretty soon, some of their parents started coming to church on Sunday, too.

This should have been a good thing. However, it was the early 1960s, and the white people of the neighbourhood weren't ready to have their church invaded by black people. They complained to my parents about the 'riffraff' coming into the church; about the problems they were sure would begin to happen – like vandalism and theft. When my parents wouldn't budge on their decision to include black people in the church, the white church-goers complained to the Colonial who was head of the Salvation Army in the Detroit area.

The Colonel talked to my parents, but they still refused to turn the black people away. "Are we not Christians?" my parents argued. "Do we not hold to the teachings of Jesus?" (My father used to tell me this story, enthusiastic and proud). But, it was 1963 and there was a lot of unrest in the United States. "If you force us to exclude the black children from the church, we'll resign," my parents said, and they did.

That took a lot of courage. They had four children at that time, and another on the way. But they stood up for what they believed, and were prepared to leave the church for it. The Salvation Army came through at the last minute, refusing to accept my parents' resignation, and offered to transfer them to another church, which my parents finally accepted.

I think about this sometimes. Did my parents take the easy way out in agreeing to a transfer? Did they feel badly about transferring instead of resigning? Did they feel badly that they couldn't 'fix' things for the black people who were coming to that church? Were they frustrated that they couldn't change the world and fix the ridiculous problems associated with racial discrimination?

This incident in my family taught me about the unfairness of the world. It showed me that being black was somehow a bad thing in the world, and when we could, we – the White people - needed to fight for the fair treatment of all.

Soul-moment number three. My father always said that the Colonial of the Salvation Army

did not like our family. He didn't like the trouble my parents had caused. My father always thought the Colonial was envious of us for some unknown reason. He transferred my family to what he probably thought was the worst possible place to be – an all-black church, in the ghetto, in the heart of Detroit. My parents thrived at that church, and they were well-loved and well-respected there. (When my mother died a few short years later, over 1000 people – mostly black – came to her funeral. Many had to stand outside.)

Our new church was the 14th Street Salvation Army Temple. We were enrolled in Angell School nearby, and my sisters and I became the visible minority in an all-black school. Sometimes we were taunted and teased on the way to school. (Our parents told us to do as Jesus did and turn the other cheek if someone hit us). At school, some of the kids pulled our hair and pinched us. Other kids, mostly girls - liked to stand behind us while we stood in line, to run their fingers through our soft hair; it was so different from their wiry hair. I think, in some cases, we were the first white people our classmates had seen up close. I sometimes felt that we – my sisters and I – were like the caged animals and the black children were poking and prodding us to see how 'real' we were.

For my sisters and me, our world was black. Our neighbours were black. Our friends were black. Most of our teachers were black, although I remember a few white teachers. (It must have been very progressive in those days to have so many black teachers available.) Our babysitters were black, and our church members were black. Our normal, everyday life was black, and we became acculturated to the black society within which we lived.

Our language became the black dialect we heard every day, and talking over the telephone, my mother's sisters remarked that they would have mistaken us for black children, our accents were so strong. This bothered my father, although I didn't understand why at the time. Every night during the supper hour, he gave us what he called, 'Grammar Lessons', while we ate our dinner. And if our black

friends happened to be eating with us, he gave them grammar lessons, too. He said, the rest of the world didn't speak this way, and someday we would have to leave this place and go to university, and it was good to start now, to learn how to speak properly.

I didn't think much about this then, and it was kind of fun to learn how to say things like, "Turn out the lights," rather than, "Cut de lights", and, "Close the door," rather than, "Shut de-dohr.", and, "Hello, how are you today?" instead of "Yo bruthr, gimme some skin!"

I learned from this, that the world would judge me harshly by how I spoke.

Soul-moment number four. About the same time that we were getting oratory lessons, I was spending a lot of time with my friend Linda, who lived a few houses down the street. We would sleep over at each other's houses and just hang out together. One morning, after a sleep-over at Linda's, her mother and auntie decided to do Linda's hair. They placed a tall bar stool in the middle of the kitchen and turned on the flame of the gas stove. Placing a heavy black metal comb in the flames, they lifted Linda onto the chair and, using the now hot comb, they styled Linda's hair by dragging the heavy comb through it, mixing in some kind of petroleum jelly. The kitchen smelled of hot hair and oil. Linda's hair became shiny and smooth, and they braided it into cute little braids and added colourful ribbons while I watched, fascinated.

As soon as Linda had hopped off the chair, I clamboured up. "Do me next, please," I begged, pulling the elastics from my silky ponytails and shaking my hair free.

You would have thought I'd made the biggest joke in the world. The two black women laughed – howled, actually – holding their sides and slumping against the edges of the table for support. "Cain't do yo hair, honey-chile," they snickered, fingering my fine curls. "It'd burn all up."

I quickly jumped off the chair feeling embarrassed and yet not sure why. It was the first time I remember my whiteness being pointed out to me, and it shocked me. I really had forgotten there was a

difference. Every day, I looked out at black faces, except for my family, and somehow I felt like I was black.

At that moment, my whiteness hit me. I realized then, I was an outsider, looking in to the black world, a place where, no matter how hard I tried, I would never totally fit.

Soul-moment number five. We moved to Saskatchewan in 1970, and many things changed in my life. We went to a predominantly White school – mostly blue-collar workers – a lot of Ukrainians, Polish, some Dutch, and White people just off the farm. (Now, this neighbourhood is considered the Inner City and is mostly inhabited by First Nation, Métis, Inuit and New Canadians – with many people living in poverty).

I was surrounded by the White Dominant Culture. I became assimilated and acculturated. It wasn't until my grade 12 year, at the nearby high school, that something happened to remind me of my childhood in Detroit, and possibly set me on this long journey to thinking about prejudice and discrimination in our society, and in our schools.

By grade 12, I had my driver's license, and my father almost always let me take the family car. This meant that I would drive my younger siblings to school with me, and I would have the car for my Special Physical Education class, which met all over the city in various sports venues. There were many people in the class who needed rides, and we took turns driving our friends and classmates to the golf course, the ski hill, the bowling alley, or wherever the class was meeting. It became a bit of a popularity contest, with the popular kids picking and choosing who would get to ride with them. (I never was in the popular group and somehow it didn't matter to me that I was never chosen by them). I had my own group of friends.

There were a couple of older students in our class – people who had dropped out of school and were now coming back to complete their grade 12, and that was the group I hung around with. One

person in that group was a First Nation girl from one of the reserves up north. She was quiet and often stood alone and apart from the others. I liked her and felt badly that she did not seem to have many friends in the class. I took it upon myself to make sure she had a ride with me every time I had the family car, and to include her whenever I had the opportunity.

I did not think anything about this. It was not anything new or special for me to act in this way. It was the way I was, and I was not doing anything out of the ordinary, in my eyes.

One Saturday afternoon, our class had finished bowling, and I was dropping everyone off at their homes. The First Nation girl lived across the river – on the east-side – and so I dropped her off last. She invited me into her house, explaining that she lived in the basement of her sister and brother-in-law's house while she was finishing Grade 12. She seemed nervous and unsure, but she led the way into her basement rooms and invited me to sit. Then she pulled out a beautifully beaded leather wallet and gave it to me. I was moved and touched, but embarrassed, too. I could not think of what I had done to deserve such a wonderful gift.

The girl told me that she really appreciated how I had befriended her and made her feel part of the group. She said most White people – students, teachers and society in general – did not treat Indians that way. She said that most White people were prejudiced and disrespectful, that they thought that Indians were stupid and could not learn. White people and White teachers treated Indians poorly and that was partly why so many Indians had a hard time getting an education. She said I was different. The wallet was her way of thanking me, for my respect, and for my friendship.

I never saw her again, and in truth, I cannot even remember her name. She went back to her reserve soon afterward, and I went on with my life. But the wallet and her words stayed with me. I used the wallet until the beads began to fall off, and the leather began to come apart at the seams. I often thought about what she said, wondering why society had to be this way. Why were White people

not more inclusive? Why was there unfair treatment and prejudice in the world, just because of skin colour? Was she right, that teachers and educators treated the Indigenous people differently in class and in school? I knew I was heading into the world of education and I vowed to make sure I was always inclusive and respectful of all people.

Soul-moment number six. The full impact of my Whiteness and blindness to White Privilege finally hit me only a couple of years ago. I was taking a university class and the professor began to talk about sitting on the board of a high school day care which provided childcare so that teen parents could continue to go to school and complete grade twelve. I was interested, as I too sit on such a board for teen parents at another high school in the city. She talked about how many barriers the students have in their way, as young parents and as First Nations people, and how the system is so difficult to navigate that it is set up so that the students cannot help but fail.

In a flash I was back in my own past. I too, was a single parent, although I was in my early twenties. I remembered how many people went out of their way to help and support me. Someone found me a nice little place to live. Someone else offered to babysit my child for free. Someone else made sure I had a ride whenever I needed one. No one put barriers in my path; indeed people were almost jumping any barriers for me, or at least holding my hand as I jumped them.

I could not help but compare myself to the young First Nation parents struggling against obstacles, trying to raise their children and get an education, and I asked myself some pretty revealing questions. If I had been a First Nation person, would someone have helped me find a place to rent? Would the owners of that house have rented to me? When I went to apply for a job, as a First Nation person, would I have been given a fair chance to interview for the job? Would I have been hired? Finally, I understood what it meant to be White and to have White Privilege and be part of the Dominant Culture. I also finally understood what my grade twelve friend had been trying to tell me

about schools, teachers and society so many years ago.

I have worked in public schools for over thirty years, and what I have noticed, and continue to notice is that that girl was right. She saw many years ago what I still see now, that our classrooms, which reflect our societal beliefs and practices, are steeped in Euro-Centric White Dominant beliefs and practices. Our schools are institutionalized structures which perpetuate racism, Othering and marginalizing of Indigenous peoples and New Canadians. Many White people are blind to this – they are products and therefore perpetrators of systemic racism.

Coming to the Research Question

Stating the Problem

What is actually happening in our classrooms and schools? Recent research states that not all First Nations and Métis students are succeeding in Saskatchewan schools. The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education's document, *Inspiring Success: Building Toward Student Achievement* published in 2009 reports that:

In Saskatchewan, only 30% of First Nations and Métis peoples aged 15-24 years have completed at least high school education. First Nations and Métis students leave school earlier and have lower high school educational attainment than Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. (p. 7)

Additionally, the Saskatoon Star-Phoenix announced, in June 2012 that:

Between 2005 and 2009, the graduation rate in the province dropped 3.3 per cent to 72.3 per cent or about 439 fewer students. During that same time, the graduation rate of First Nation and Métis students increased 1.2 per cent to 32.7 per cent. (p. A4)

So we can see that only 32% of our Indigenous people are graduating from high school. Educators need to acknowledge this tragic evidence which reveals our sorely lacking track record of success for our First Nations, Métis, Inuit and New Canadian students. Questions need to be asked. Why is this happening? How do classroom practices and teacher attitudes and beliefs impact this? Although I will not address it here, how does poverty impact student success and achievement? What can we, as individual educators in our individual classrooms, do to change this statistic and help empower students to learn and grow to their full potential?

In my experience, many caring teachers, as products of the society in which they are raised, are blind to their own culpability in student failure. They unknowingly wash their hands of any

responsibility for helping students achieve success by placing blame on low socio-economic factors or by blaming the victim – the students and/or their families (Valencia, 2010) to the detriment of the Indigenous and New Canadian students.

In a paper delivered at the Ethnographic Conference in Spring of 1988 at the University of Georgia, George and Louise Spindler presented an interesting but very impactful study they conducted in American schools. The study examined how:

...the school selects children to participate in the American dialogue...[Y]et others will, in effect, be discarded, left so far outside of the center that there is little hope for them to move into it...perhaps as many as 25%...drop out before the second year of high school.” (p. 5)

I believe that this is part of what is happening in schools in Saskatchewan with our Indigenous, Métis, Inuit and New Canadian students. Students are 'selected' for success or failure in grade school by White Dominant teacher attitudes, practices and beliefs. These attitudes, practices and beliefs of our teachers are so ingrained, so subliminal, that they are not even on the radar of disturbing behaviours, and pass for 'normal' interactions with students. This, of course, often results in devastating failure rates on the part of students, especially our Indigenous and Ethnic students, while teachers wring their hands, feel a sense of failure and wonder why they can't make a positive impact for the children they are charged with helping.

The marginalizing of students across our city, province and country is an enormous and on-going issue. This must be addressed in order to begin to change statistics such as those previously mentioned. Critical though, *it is not the statistics which matter but the fact that they represent individuals, their lives and their livelihoods.* Our Indigenous students are members of our society – people who continue to be marginalized and Othered throughout Canada and around the world.

Teachers Constructs as Good and Caring

Another complex and complicated reason for graduation rates such as these has to do with teachers' preconceived notions of themselves and their actions as they perform their duties as teachers. As I read and research further into educational theory and practice, I come up against hard evidence which suggests that there is “considerable discrepancy between teachers' perceptions of their own innovative behavior and the perceptions of observers. *Teachers sincerely thought they were individualizing instruction, encouraging learning*, involving children in group processes, and so on” (italics added for emphasis, Goodlad, Klein, and associates, 1974, p. 98). In fact, “the teachers were almost always immediately visible, usually in front of the room and usually addressing or questioning the entire class” (p. 91).

Haberman (2010) defines these schools as urban schools with “poor or minority youngsters” who are primarily “affected by their socioeconomic class” (p. 1). In my experience, these are schools with high Indigenous and New Canadian populations, poverty, low-income families, English as the additional language, and parents who often have not finished high school themselves. The obvious concern here is that teaching in many instances, still remains teacher-centred and teacher-controlled, much like the previous description, and yet the teachers think they are helping students.

Research also indicates that teachers become teachers, heart and soul, and are good and caring people (Palmer, 2007). Like everyone else, teachers (mainly White middle class females) are products of the Dominant Discourse of society. I truly believe that most teachers are well-intentioned and get into the profession because they want to make a difference in people's lives. They want to see their students grow and thrive – flourish under their tutelage. In my experience, what often happens, especially in community schools — is that the teachers bump up against invisible societal norms and barriers which prevent teaching and learning from taking place.

Unaware of these invisible barriers, the teachers, feeling frustrated and powerless, unknowingly buy into the norms of Euro-Centric attitudes and beliefs and become part of systemic racism.

Frankenberg explores White women and race, stating that, “racism was and is something that shapes White women’s lives” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 6) and that “we tend to view it as an issue that people of color face and have to struggle with, but not as an issue that generally involves or implicates us.”

Many White people, including teachers, have never thought of themselves as racist or part of the race issue or problem. I would suggest that most teachers see themselves not as complicit in race issues but as rescuers and leaders in showing people how to live without the constructs of race, yet not realizing that they themselves are enmeshed in it.

I have had the amazing opportunity, for the past ten years, to work in two educational worlds. As mentioned before, one of my roles was that of Professional Development leader, offering in-services, coaching, modelling and collaborating with teachers, using powerful literacy strategies in sessions as well as in teachers’ classrooms. In my other role, I used, and hopefully, perfected the literacy strategies in my own classroom in various community schools. My days were usually split into half days. I taught in my own classroom in the mornings and in the afternoons I gave workshops and/or coached and modeled in other classrooms.

Having worked in three community schools over the past ten years, primarily with students in grades 5 – 8 who were struggling with reading and writing, and who were often disenchanted and disengaged with school, I believe I have some insight into the challenges and struggles our First Nations, Métis, Inuit and New Canadian children face as they sit in classrooms every day. In general, I have noticed that the teachers who work in Community schools fall into three groups, the young, inexperienced teachers, the more experienced teachers who are White, First Nation or Metis who teach in controlling Euro-Centric ways and the true/ authentic teacher. In using terms such as

‘true/authentic/enlightened/transformed/engaged/real/genuine’ teachers, I mean that these teachers use many strong teaching practices and sets expectations high for all students. These teachers use life experiences as teaching tools - real life and relevant learning experiences to motivate and engage students. Some of the real life, relevant learning experiences might be writing letters to the government to change laws, or to businesses to protest against environmental issues. Students might interview people in the community and share the results with the public. True/authentic teachers are always looking for ways to make learning valid and real and teach life skills which will benefit the students for their entire lives. Let us examine these three kinds of teachers and some of their beliefs, attitudes and teaching practices.

Examining the Teachers, Their Practices, Beliefs and Attitudes

Many young, naïve teachers are thrown into a community school with little teaching experience and are doing their best to survive their first year or two of teaching. They do not really understand their students or where they are coming from, and they have never been asked to think about their place in the Dominant Culture. They are blind to White Privilege and do not see that some of their actions are disrespectful and hurtful to the students and their families. Sometimes they have the idea that White teachers are the powerful ones who 'help them', or as McIntyre writes, “whites were presented as wanting/needing to ‘rescue’ people of colour who the participants see as less fortunate than many whites” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 79).

It is the role of the teacher to help each student feel good about him/herself no matter his/her skin colour and that in turn builds a better community, and a better society. The founder of progressive schooling in the United States, John Dewey puts it this way:

[T]he school itself shall be made a genuine form of active community life, instead of a place set apart in which to learn lessons. A society is a number of people held together

because they are working along common lines, in a common spirit, and with reference to common aims. (Dewey, 1929, p. 11)

The inexperienced teachers of this world would never guess that many of the things they do every day contribute to on-going, systemic racism. They do not lead to better relationships or understanding between people. The teachers continue to marginalize and they “are unable to see the advantage afforded to the white population within this country. Furthermore, they fail to see how these advantages come at the expense of the disadvantaged” (McIntyre, 1997). They implicitly feel: “To be White is to be superior, good and innocent, all at the same time, and anything that threatens that positioning is discredited.”

Experienced controlling teachers. These teachers thrive in tidy, orderly classrooms in which they have total authority and control, which is a Euro-Centric construct of what learning should look like. They do not like not knowing or not being in control. These teachers loved school as children and the tight control of the classroom their former teachers exhibited, so they run their rooms in much the same way.

As John Dewey so poignantly and prophetically wrote so long ago:

[T]he teacher is not in the school to impose certain ideas or to form certain habits in the child, but is there as a member of the community to select the influences which shall affect the child and to assist him in properly responding to these influences. (Dewey, 1929, p. 37)

He also argues that school is not engaging for the students who must learn in this rigid fashion, and adds “the child comes to the traditional school with a healthy body and a more or less unwilling mind...he has to leave his mind behind because there is no way to use it in the school” (Dewey, 1915, p.73).

How does this happen, and how does it continue to happen in American, and indeed in Canadian schools, when teachers are convinced that they are “determined to give every child...a fair chance” (Spindler & Spindler, 1988, p. 5). I believe that many teachers do not reflect on their practice. They continue to teach in an outdated, autonomic atmosphere, using restrictive Euro-centric methods which stifle learning, and creativity.

Haberman (2010) calls it the *Pedagogy of Poverty*. His research suggests there is a basic form of teaching in urban or community schools. He lists fourteen acts or teacher actions on the pedagogy: giving information, asking questions, giving directions, making assignments, monitoring seatwork, reviewing assignments, giving tests, reviewing tests, assigning homework, reviewing homework, settling disputes, punishing noncompliance, marking papers, and grading papers (p. 1).

Although he admits that these teaching actions are used from time to time by many teachers, he adds:

Taken together and performed to the systematic exclusion of other acts, they have become the pedagogical coin of the realm in urban schools. They constitute the pedagogy of poverty – not merely what teachers do and what youngsters expect, but, for different reasons, what parents, the community and the general public assume teaching to be. (p. 1)

The true/authentic teacher. These teachers see their students as unique individuals. They work hard year after year to build a community of learners within the classroom. These teachers think of themselves as learning partners in the classroom. They set expectations high for the students, scaffolding their learning and celebrating their successes with them. They work on mutual respect in the classroom and teach their students learning processes which promote independent learning each so that school can be joy-filled for everyone.

[A] pedagogy based on an antithetical principle has arisen: *students and the act of learning are more important* than teachers and the act of teaching. The student is regarded as a reservoir of knowledge to be tapped, students are encouraged to teach each other, the standards of accountability emerge from the group itself, and the teacher's role varies from facilitator to co-learner.” (Palmer, 2007, p. 118)

How do the true/authentic teachers become so? Are there things to be learned from their thoughts and ideas about students and teaching? What are the techniques, beliefs, practices and attitudes they use?

We need more true/authentic if we are going to support and scaffold our students' learning, help them find natural joy in learning, help them live up to their potential, pass high school and begin, with their teachers' help, to question, disrupt and then dismantle the prejudices upon which White Dominant Culture has been built.

Re-statement of the Problem

Many teachers come into their classrooms every day, with Euro-Centric, White dominant, hidden, unexamined thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and expectations. These directly impact students' academic success as well as their emotional well-being. However, some teachers seek to disrupt the status quo of racial difference and marginalization, teach for social justice and social action to help disrupt White Dominant Culture and discourse, and at the same time empower their students to learn and succeed.

I believe there are at least three enormous, very pervasive, subliminal issues which are at play within our educational institutions and within the makeup of our educators, which make addressing the issue of low achievement rates for our Indigenous and New Canadian students difficult to even begin to tackle. The issues are societal and buried deeply within society's norms. They are in everyday-life and

underlie how we function as a society and as an individual within that society. The following issues pervade teaching culture: White Dominant Culture and blindness to White Privilege; Teachers as 'good', 'fair-minded' and 'innocent' protectors of our youth; and teacher practices, attitudes and procedures which are often Euro-Centric ways of teaching.

We don't know how to begin to tackle these issues because the strands from each of these runs deeply into the psyche of society and indeed into the psyche of each teacher. After all, teachers, mostly White and female, are products of the Dominant Culture and its norms. This is part of the cause for continued, unaddressed, systemic racism within our schools, and the continued disengagement of many of our Indigenous students and New Canadian students.

The Research Question

How can teachers begin to deconstruct Euro-Centric, White Dominant beliefs, practices, attitudes and expectations in order to positively impact *all students* and their academic well-being?

Secondary Questions

- What successes are teachers having in teaching all students, including First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Ethnic students?
- What teacher or classroom practices are they using which address this success?
- How does self-reflection help teachers change their beliefs and practices?
- How does building a community of learners impact this?
- How do books and discussions play a role in regard to student success and/or engagement?

Through these questions, I have explored the issues of White Dominant Culture and Colour blindness to White Privilege, teachers as 'good', 'fair-minded' and 'innocent' protectors of our youth, and teacher practices, attitudes and procedures which are entrenched in Euro-centric, antiquated ways of controlling classrooms, in hopes of discovering how to create more authentic teachers such as Ms. Truman.

Organization of Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. In this first chapter I provided background

information on how I came to have shifts in consciousness and defining moments in my life, which led me toward pursuing this topic. I also provided background information on the relevance for this topic, as well as introduced my research position and question.

In chapter two I provide a review of literature relevant to my topic. I connect to the history of on-going prejudice of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Ethnic students, and show how this has impacted teachers' unfounded, yet invisible beliefs that the students are not as capable as White students. I also look at a study which reveals a teacher's hidden curriculum, because it provides evidence of the invisibility of many teacher practices which malign students. Lastly, I review literature of critical race theory and anti-racist education because it provides many ways to begin to unpack teachers' hidden discriminatory practices. I conclude by looking at the area which still needs to be researched and which I hope this current study will help address.

In the third chapter I introduce both the methodology and the method to be utilized in the current study. I include within the chapter a discussion of my position as researcher and self-reporter. I explain how a combination of using the methodology of interviewing and then portraiture to share findings seems to be a good method for this study.

In the fourth chapter I introduce the participants who were involved in the study. Using portraiture, I paint a picture of what these teachers and their classrooms are like on a daily basis. The main focus of this chapter is to present the data that was the result of the interviews with the participants.

In the fifth chapter I answer the research questions. I synthesize the results of the findings through comments from the participants. I also present two tables that present the results in an abbreviated manner. I then provide means by which educators can begin to un-Whiten their classrooms by becoming aware of, paying attention to and challenging their own racial prejudices.

Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

In this chapter I will review the literature on which I based my research. I have organized it into several areas, though some of the research overlaps into more than one area. First, I will review some of the history of literature around racial biases, discrimination and Euro-Centric, White Dominance in society, as well as how the null and hidden curricula of teachers impacts student learning. Next I will examine the literature around students as informants in their classrooms. What do students notice that their teachers and administrators do not see? I will then review the literature around teachers as good-caring individuals, and how this image of self, in regard to race and White Privilege, can make it difficult for teachers to first, see issues within themselves and secondly, facilitate necessary changes. The literature argues many teacher methods still in use today are antiquated, Euro-Centric teacher practices that continue to thrive in our schools to the detriment of our students. I will then take a look at Deconstructing White Dominant thinking and Antiracist Education, as well as the teaching of Multicultural Education and the Curriculum. Since I am focusing on educators, I will connect teachers and my experience in community schools in the western prairies, with the issues and evidence in this literature review.

Dewey reminds us that schools and the health of schools are a reflection of society. Not only is “the institution of school a microcosm of society” (Dewey, 1915, p. 15) it is also a mirror into which educators periodically take a glance; and a window into the world. What do educators see reflected back at them? I suggest that because of White Privilege and a normative hegemonic society, educators peer at the world through falsely tinted glass. Just as fish do not know what water is, educators miss seeing how White Privilege negatively impacts society and educational institutions, and indeed their own classrooms. They do not see their own culpability in perpetuating racism and in marginalizing

their own students.

White Dominant Euro-Centric Constructs in Society

There is much evidence, historically, which makes it easy for White Society to take Whiteness for granted and unthinkingly accept all of the privileges, power and dominance it produces, without reflecting on what it really means to be White in our world. This evidence justifies putting White Society higher than people of colour and has given White people permission to feel, act and believe they are intellectually superior to people of colour, and in turn helps to marginalize and Other the Indigenous people of the world through colonization in the name of “saving or improving the savage” (Fanon, 1952, 2008; Biolsi, 1997; Thobani, 2007; Fletcher, 2008; Lewis & Solorzano, 2006; Deloira, 1969; McDermott, 1997; Said, 1978; Thielen-Wilson, 2012; Valencia, 2010). Teachers too, sometimes arrive at school with preconceived ideas and constructs of superiority. These constructs manifest in the ways some teachers interact with their Indigenous students.

Teachers sometimes have an attitude about them which suggests that their role in the community classrooms is that of assimilation. Whether a conscious effort or not, their goal is to make Indigenous and New Canadian students like White people. Teachers have definite ideas about what Indigenous students and students of colour can and cannot accomplish, and this often becomes a self-fulfilled prophecy of negative or non-teaching methods, all built on the false societal notion that White is better. So, at an early age, students learn that having White skin is crucial to success in school and in life, and that the White, Euro-centric schooling experience can have a negative and devastating effect on students of colour.

A black psychiatrist, philosopher and activist from the Caribbean, Frantz Fanon (2008) is very clear about how White Privilege maligns:

I start suffering from not being a white man insofar as the white man discriminates

against me; turns me into a colonized subject; robs me of any value or originality; tells me I am a parasite in the world, that I should toe the line of the white world as quickly as possible. (Fanon, 2008, p. 78)

White teachers, many of whom have not confronted their own racism, are blind to their actions, although the students very quickly feel the impact of the teacher's racist attitudes and behaviours. This is a complicated issue since, historically White people, teachers included, have been raised to believe that being White means being racially and intellectually superior. Until very recently, White Society, including teachers, had not been taught about the impact of colonization on Indigenous people, but also on Canadian society as well.

Complicit in colonization was the rationalization of taking the land and putting the Indigenous people of Canada on reserves and subjecting them to the trauma and torture of the Residential School (Thobani, 2007; Fletcher, 2008 Thielen-Wilson, 2012; Deloria, 1969; Orlowski, 2011; Ibrahim Alladin, 1996). Thielen-Wilson speaks of the possessive individualism of the Colonists as part explanation for White dominant culture and discourse. She explains that "the usurpation of land was said to be justified only if imposed upon non-equals" (p. 6). So, White dominant society justified the stealing of land and torturing of people by claiming the people were lesser, by claiming that they needed to be reformed; they needed to adopt the ways of White culture and White society.

Teachers are products of this thinking – it has been instilled in them as children along with the rest of society. Education brushed over Residential Schools and/or made it seem as if the Indigenous people were willing participants, and no one looked too closely at what actually happened to families and family life for the Indigenous peoples of Canada. White cultures are different from Indigenous cultures in that White society tends to be materialistic with the idea that owning and possessing things brings success and power. White society is constructed in such a way that individual success and gain

is at the forefront of power and control.

Individual rights are a foundational piece of White Dominant America, and I would add, White Canadian culture (McIntyre, 1997; Thobani, 2007; Thielen-Wilson, 2012). White, European Colonists came to Canada in order to own land, which they felt would make them successful. This, in turn would give them power (Thielen-Wilson, 2012). Feeling powerful, because they owned land, Colonists felt that they were superior to the Indigenous peoples of the land who had different cultural beliefs and philosophies and did not believe in ownership. (The Colonists conveniently forgot, or perhaps many did not know, how Indigenous people had helped many of the first Settlers by teaching them skills of trapping and hunting, of knowledge of medicinal plants and herbs and of how to survive in winter.) Owning land and feeling successful made it easy for White Dominance to take a foothold in Canadian culture and for White people to feel powerful and superior to the Indigenous people, which they saw as lesser.

“[I]ndividualism lies at the very core of a white patriarchal class-based culture that prides itself on pursuing individual rights and gaining material and political resources in order to maintain power and advantage” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 61). I mention this in arguing that that sense of superiority and entitlement was also imposed upon – and continues to be imposed upon -- what White Dominant society sees as non-equals. Fanon (2008), in *Black Skin, White Masks*, says, “One is white, so one is rich, so one is handsome, so one is intelligent” (p. 34). I would add, so one feels one is superior. So we can see how historically, White Dominant Culture and Discourse was constructed based on false pretenses and ideals to justify the usurping of power and land, which had tragic consequences for the Indigenous People of Canada. White teachers have grown up in this and are constructed to think and act as superior to and better than their Indigenous students.

In general, Dominant White Society is colour-blind (McIntyre, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993;

Orlowski, 2011; Fanon, 2008) blind to the colour White and the superiority and privilege under which society functions and performs for those with White skin. It is easier to remain blind than to begin the process of self-reflection and change. Indeed, White people are blind to the problems and constructs of race and do not see a need to change. This includes most White educators.

Frankenberg (1993) explains this as being colour-blind or power-blind to White race and power. She defines colour-blindness as “a mode of thinking about race organized around an effort to not ‘see’, or at any rate not to acknowledge, race differences” (p. 142). White Society puts up barriers and deflects issues in order to remain unaware of the systemic problems of racism, thus perpetuating the issues. Teachers are complicit in this.

The world over, White Society has enjoyed a position of power for many hundreds of years and has taken advantage of the world's indigenous populations in many unscrupulous, tragic and harmful ways (Fanon, 1952, 2008; Biolsi, 1997; Thobani, 2007; St. Denis, 2007; Fletcher, 2008; Lewis & Solorzano, 2006; McDermott, 1997; Said, 1978; Thielen-Wilson, 2012; Valencia, 2010). As well, White Dominant Culture and discourse have been self-perpetuating and self-serving in practices of on-going racism (Fanon, 1952, 2008; Biolsi, 1997; Thobani, 2007; St. Denis, 2007; Fletcher, 2008; Lewis & Solorzano, 2006; McDermott, 1997; Said, 1978; Thielen-Wilson, 2012; Valencia, 2010). This is impactful on how teachers relate to and teach their Indigenous students since some teachers unknowingly perpetuate racism by the very fact that they do not understand the history of colonization. They feel an unnamed sense of superiority, and have a false sense of power in trying to rescue or save their students by making them conform to the Dominant Culture. Complicit in this is the fact that as White people, the teachers are blind to the underlying reasons for their racist actions they put upon their Indigenous students.

White Society, including educators, has become very good at avoiding self-reflection, in

deflecting blame and turning the lens back toward the Other (Thobani, 2007; Fanon 2008; Frankenberg, 1993; McIntyre, 1997). This lack of self-reflection keeps White Society “innocent” of any wrong doing and conveniently distances them from the problems of our world: “The lack of self-reflection about being a white person in this society distances white people from investigating the meaning of whiteness and prohibits a critical examination of the individual, institutional, and cultural forms of racism” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 14). As members of the Dominant society, some White teachers are complicit in this as well. They blindly perpetuate racism by continuing to teach in ways which malign and Other Indigenous students. The teachers do not see themselves as racist, but as caring people who are trying to help the students conform to White standards and White ways.

White Society and Dominant Discourse insist that race is not a White person’s problem; however, St. Denis (2007) argues, “Race matters because members of a society have internalized racist ideas about what skin colour tells about the value and worth of a person or group of people” (p. 1071). The issues of racism are internalized. They are invisible to discussion and therefore are not reflected upon but accepted as the norm. Thus, the way things are done in some White Dominant classrooms reflect internalized racism which cannot be discussed since it is invisible. Some White teachers continue to “teach” and manage their classrooms in this way and it is difficult to point out the issues of racism since they are so embedded in the way the classroom, the school and society operates on a daily basis. These teachers resist change because they see no need to do so, and hang on to the control they have in their classrooms. Hence, race then becomes about power.

Edward Said (1978) writes about the relationship between European or White society and the Orient as “a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.” He also explores the “idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures” (p.6). Although Said is speaking and writing about the Orient, his ideas reach

across the world to Canada where European settlers continue to have a sense of superiority, power and dominance over the Indigenous people, as well as the Newcomers who are now making Canada their home. This effect is also felt in some of the classrooms of our schools where White Dominance is the norm, and where some teachers have a sense of obligation to help their students function within White society, where the students are White are not.

The hegemonic norm of White Privilege and White Power is strong and invisible. It is a sense of entitlement and superiority with which White Dominant society views the world (Fanon, 1952, 2008; Biolsi, 1997; Thobani, 2007; Fletcher, 2008; Lewis & Solorzano, 2006; McDermott, 1997; Said, 1978; Thielen-Wilson, 2012; Valencia, 2010). As we now see, this happens for many reasons, most of which involves White Society deflecting and avoiding responsibility for on-going systemic racism. White Society, including teachers, have not been taught to reflect upon or question what it means to be White in this world. White teachers, in particular, have not been taught to think about what their unresolved racist issues might do to the students they teach.

McIntyre (1997) worked with many pre-service teachers in a study to try to expose White Racism within the group:

One of the most compelling and disturbing aspects of the group talk was the way in which the participants controlled the discourse of whiteness so that they didn't have to shoulder responsibility for the racism that exists in our society *today*. (italics original, p.43)

So, while White Dominant society is connected to racism, we, as White people, and teachers specifically, somehow manage to avoid reflecting upon it and truly beginning to see ourselves and our role in perpetuating racism.

We can also see the disturbing impact this can have on people who are not White, as St. Denis (2007) reflects:

Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal people, in general, experience racism and the effects of a belief in white superiority in different ways; they also respond in different ways to that racialization. For example, if passing as white is an option for some Aboriginal people, then passing can become an expedient option. But choosing to pass has its own consequences, one of which may include denying that racism is a problem as one way to achieve acceptance. (p. 1082)

How does this happen? It is White privilege, which works to benefit White people. And in classrooms where many students are Indigenous students, what effect does this have upon them? How can we begin to address these issues and begin to balance that sense of power?

McIntyre identifies it as white power, and speaks of it as “recognition of what whites have acquired, what whites 'have', and what it means to be situated in the dominant positions of our society” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 89). She goes on to explain that White people do not understand that the power came from unfair and unjust means such as slavery, enforced assimilation, and acculturation practices such as Residential Schools, and “the destruction of other people in the name of democracy, freedom, and equal rights,” (p. 89) and therefore, the “lack of understanding about the history of white dominance in this country, and the world, resulting in a skewed understanding of what constitutes white power and privilege” (p. 89). Most White teachers have not been pushed to look at themselves as racist beings and to understand how this can influence their interactions with their students, and indeed, the success or failure of their Indigenous students. Indeed, it is very complicated because Whiteness is about power, about race, about Dominance and Dominant culture and yet it is invisible, and to White people it is considered to be the only way.

Frankenberg (1993) says that “Whiteness served simultaneously to eclipse and marginalize others (two modes of making the other inessential)” (p. 197) and that “the self, where it is part of a

dominant cultural group, does not have to name itself” (p. 196). In not naming Whiteness as a race with racial issues it remains invisible. The Dominant Culture remains color-blind. It does not have to take responsibility for issues and therefore does not have to change.

As a result, White Society, in general, and White people as a whole, are very reluctant to poke a stick at Whiteness, White Privilege and Dominant culture and discourse. White people prefer to remain “innocent” and ignorant of their role and complicit-ness in racism. Included in this, many teachers are reluctant to talk about race and racism and their own place in it. It is uncomfortable to discover that one is racist. Therefore most White people, many teachers included, deny that racism is about them.

McIntyre's research indicates that it is very difficult for White people to recognize what is happening; “white people's lack of consciousness about their racial identities limits their ability to critically examine their own positions as racial beings who are implicated in the existence and perpetuation of racism” (p.16). She also notes that there is “the necessity of/for white people to speak openly and honestly about our own collusion in maintaining and sustaining the fabric of racism that weaves in and out of the social system in our society” (p. 41). Hence, it is difficult for White society in general, and White teachers specifically, to begin to peel back the layers of systemic racism and Dominant society since it is so insidious and so uncomfortable. It is far easier to remain “innocent” and “blameless”, since White is invisible, yet this very action perpetuates racism.

Kailen (2002) reminds us that white teachers are no more biased than any other whites in society, but rather, “institutionalized racism and the socially constructed category of ‘race’ have shaped white peoples' consciousness just as surely as they have shaped people of color, but in a manner that has been largely undefined and unrecognized by whites” (p. 18). If it is unrecognized and undefined in the Dominant culture, than it is falsely concluded by White Society to be non-existent. Therefore, in order to help White Society, specifically teachers confront racism, one must first help teachers to

recognize and define racism. This, in turn, might help teachers see their culpability in racism, and the uneven balance of power in race. This is a difficult pill for White society, and White teachers to swallow. It is far easier to block, deflect and ignore racism rather than begin to deconstruct dominant thinking.

Frankenberg (1993) argues that:

Rather than viewing white culture as ‘no culture’, we need to analyze the social and political contexts in which, like race privilege, white cultural practices mark out a normative space and set identities, which those who inhabit them, however, frequently cannot see or name. (p. 192)

White teachers, in particular, need to understand White privilege and all that it brings, invisible, into the classrooms of our schools, especially the community schools. Unnamed and invisible, this force continues to malign and Other our students, and White teachers unknowingly aid in this by not confronting their own racist attitudes and actions. By not being aware of, reflecting upon, understanding and uncovering the racial issues in society, teachers perpetuate the problems and continue to malign those they intend to help.

It is for White people to begin to deconstruct race and White Privilege, and this is impactful to the academic success of Indigenous students and Ethnic students: “The issue of racism in teaching arises, among other things, in connection with whether teachers are able to identify with their students or whether they are affected by stereotypes with reference to students of color” (Kailen, p.18). In order to better identify and bond with their students, teachers need to first become aware that they have biases against their Indigenous students and then openly address the negative stereotypes. They need to unpack the issues of racism at the root of the stereotypes. Until this happens, Indigenous students will continue to be maligned and Othered in our classrooms.

So we can see that many teachers, as products of the Dominant Culture, are colour-blind, blind to White privilege. Hence, they continue to marginalize and Other students in their classrooms, while the students continue to struggle and often fail academically. In essence, some teachers are power blind.

Exploring Teachers' Null and Hidden Curricula

White teachers bring to their classrooms many invisible forces, attitudes and practices of which they are not usually aware, including making decisions about what to teach or not to teach. This is often referred to as the null curriculum. “The null curriculum results from decisions made about what to teach and what not to teach...the lack of inclusion in the explicit curriculum of diverse forms of family...is an example of a null curriculum” (Turner-Vorbeck, 2008, p. 181). I find the idea of the null curriculum fascinating and disturbing at the same time. Until recently, I did not know that there were terms for these kinds of hidden attitudes and beliefs, although I know I have discussed them at length, especially in terms of what teachers do, or do not do, in their classrooms. This includes how teachers relate to their students, the beliefs they have about their students, the expectations they set for their students, and the ways they go about helping their students. Research later on shows that some teachers are unaware that they have a preference for which students they help or do not help during the school day. This too relates to the null curriculum since it has to do with the teacher’s underlying belief about which students will be most successful. But included in this is the fact that some important aspects of Canadian history are either left off the curriculum or glossed over in inadequate ways.

Orlowski (2011) explores the idea that certain topics, especially those having to do with the treatment of the Indigenous people of Canada, have been purposely left out of the curriculum as a way of protecting Dominant Culture: “In retrospect, it is clear that the curriculum developers had engaged in omission as a hegemonic strategy” (p. 78). He explains how this affected him as a Canadian citizen:

“In short, because of its expected role of maintaining traditional racial hierarchies, the school had failed to properly educate me so that I would develop into a critically thinking citizen able to contend with complex issues of race” (p. 78). Orlowski is merely one of millions of Canadians who are suffering under the same hegemonic strategies. The others, of course, include the teachers and educators in our schools, who in many cases are not aware of and do not understand how racism affects teachers, themselves, schools, classrooms and students. This harkens back to what was earlier mentioned, that certain historical topics such as colonization and residential schools, are left off the curriculum, or only mentioned briefly and in positive ways, giving students false ideas about what actually happened. This perpetuating of false ideas and information has adversely affected the Indigenous people of Canada.

The curriculum has also been constructed in such a way so that it continues to marginalize the Other: “The discursive modes of analysis have led to various models of education that focus on students' perceived deficits and ignore systemic racism and structural failures of the educational systems” (Battiste, 2011 p. 289). White educators continue to focus on students' failures, blaming the families for not caring about their children and not caring about education, while simply not seeing their own complicity and participation in on-going institutional, systemic racism. In this way, the teachers simply wash their hands of responsibility for student success and don't look for different ways to reach and teach all of their students, feeling that it's the students' responsibility to find ways to succeed in school. They also continue to perpetuate racism by not teaching curricular or historical content in relevant and meaningful ways.

Educators also continue to Other the Aboriginal people of today by teaching about them from a historical perspective, as if the Indigenous people are trapped and lost in time. By reifying a people in this way they are objectified (Thobani, 2007). This Others them until they become objectified and idealized and therefore do not seem real (Deloria, 1969; St. Denis, 2009; Bilosi, 1971): “This

objectification of culture also suggests that culture is something to be 'lost' and 'found'. It is as if people are no longer agents; culture happens to them” (St. Denis, 2009, p. 169). This continues to confuse and confound all students and does not present a way in which to begin to deconstruct racism and racist ideas in Canada.

Rather than teach in-depth about the unique histories and cultures of the various Indigenous groups, some educators 'surface' teach and concentrate on topics such as dinner, dance and dress. When they teach in this way, they *have frozen the people in a historical time frame*, which continues to Other them. All Indigenous groups are clumped into one homogenous mass and students are taught as if all groups are the same, which continues to objectify and Other them (St. Denis, 2009; Thobani, Bilosi, 1971; Deloria, 1969). It is easier for teachers to teach in this way, often relying on a workbook or worksheets which present surface or even false or stereotyped information. Most teachers, who have grown up with the same curricular content are unsure of the historical facts and implications and often feel better following this false curriculum rather than taking on the tougher task of looking at the real life issues underlying colonization and residential schools.

Although teaching about the dinner, dance and dress of Indigenous people is a good and comfortable place to begin, some teachers avoid the controversial, confusing and complicated issues of today. Instead, they do a lesson on how to bead or teach about all of the uses of the buffalo. In teaching in this way, some educators continue to perpetuate systemic racism. They do not value nor validate the Indigenous people as important, knowledgeable and contributing members of our society and of our schools and communities, and this is reflected in the way educators teach about the First Nations. Often, the way teachers teach diversity has a way of dividing more than bringing together the commonalities of people and culture.

St. Denis (2007) cautions that:

Educators can end up doing cross-cultural awareness training that often has the effect of encouraging the belief that the cultural difference of the Aboriginal 'Other' is the problem. Offering cultural awareness workshops can also provide another opportunity for non-Aboriginals to resent and resist Aboriginal people. (p. 1086)

The idea behind teaching cultural awareness and responsiveness as well as multiculturalism is to bring people together, and yet the opposite effect is often evident. Sleeter (1991) explores the idea of several models of multiculturalism used in schools, many of which seem to support student learning but in reality do more harm than good. “These benevolent helping models, although they may be implemented with good intentions and produce some positive results, tend to reinforce the status quo and disable members of oppressed groups” (p.4) How can we begin to teach these things in such a way as to open up healthy discussions which help foster a sense of community for everyone not matter what they culture or background? Sleeter suggests that “empowering education programs work with students and their home communities to build on what they bring; disabling programs ignore and attempt to eradicate knowledge and strengths students brings, and replace them with those of the dominant society” (p. 5).

And finally, we need look to the curriculum. What are teachers actually expected to teach? In my experience, the Saskatchewan Curriculum is still predominantly Euro-Centric and does not aid the teacher in finding ways to begin to debunk the racist beliefs and practices.

Battiste supports this:

Well into the last half of the last century, educational equity was the impetus for educational change. Provincial governments have begun to experiment with some program initiatives to improve access and retention of First Nations students as well as review the curricula and textbooks for damaging stereotypes. (Battiste, 2004, p. 8)

Things are changing, but not fast enough, nor drastically enough. Multiculturalism continues to be taught in many schools in a way which does nothing to advance the Indigenous people of Canada, and actually continues to malign, marginalize, and Other. Battiste stresses the need to push for rethinking and reform through curriculum renewal: “The key in designing meaningful educational curricula in Canada is to confront the hidden standards of racism, colonialism, and cultural and linguistic imperialism in the modern curriculum and see the theoretical incoherence with modern theories in society” (Battiste, 2011, p. 305).

And so we see that the need to re-look at the curriculum is an urgent matter which needs to be addressed. This would go a long way in helping all students understand and begin to deconstruct Dominant thinking in society and especially in the classroom. It would also help White teachers, going through their own schooling with a new curriculum, begin to see White privilege and the constructs of power long before they became teachers. Perhaps then, the challenges of colour-blindness and the invisibleness of the White race would be much less and teachers would come into education and their own classrooms more open-minded to the problems of race and the issues facing all people. Racism would then become a problem and responsibility for everyone, not just an issue Indigenous people have to somehow come to terms with and solve, since that is another way of blaming and placing the problems squarely on the shoulders of the Indigenous people.

St. Denis (2007) cautions us to understand and be cognizant of how pushing Aboriginal people to find and explore their culture can be harmful to some individuals:

To some degree, cultural revitalization encourages Aboriginal people to seek out and perform cultural authenticity as compensation for exploitation and oppression. Although cultural revitalization is liberating for many, it can also function to blame the victim, suggesting that the social problems faced by the Aboriginal people occur because Aboriginal people have lost their

culture, they have failed to get it back, and/or they are not doing their culture properly. (p. 1080)

Dominant discourse and hegemonic ideas have contributed to the continuation of racism in our schools and the curricula often supports the hegemonic norms which are strongly in place in society as well as in our schools and classroom, but these are not the only issues students face in our classrooms. Teachers come into the classrooms with ideas and attitudes which often malign students, yet these issues are usually unaddressed since they are not visible. This is called the hidden curriculum.

The hidden curriculum has to do with the kinds of beliefs and practices teachers have and use in their classrooms. It “is constituted by what students learn in school *that is not a part* of the intentional, explicit curriculum” (italics for emphasis, Turner-Vorbeck, 2008, p. 182). Kincheloe (2008) refers to the neutral curriculum, saying, “Too often, mainstream education teaches students and teachers to accept the oppressive workings of power – in the name of a neutral curriculum, in the attempt to take politics out of education” (p. 34). She also points out that most of society expects teachers to stay away from the politics of society. In actuality, “Students, however, need to understand the covert political implications of almost everything that presents itself as objective information, disinterested science, and balanced curricula” (p. 35). More and more I see that teaching is political (Apple, 2004). It has to be political if teachers are going to undertake to deconstruct Dominant thinking and help their students understand the many issues and angles of society. Some teachers are not comfortable with politics in the classroom and try to ignore issues which need to be addressed if students are going to live and thrive in our world.

Teachers who say they are not political, and who strive to stay away from politics in the classroom are only fooling themselves (Orlowski, 2011). By avoiding speaking about social issues, teachers make this part of the hidden and null curricula. These then become unresolved issues which

hang like dark clouds over the classroom and the students. White teachers bring to their schools, their classrooms and their relationships with students an invisible, hidden (although not always hidden, especially to their students) sense of superiority, power and dominance, and complicit in this, a blindness to that power, control and privilege of being White (Fanon, 1952, 2008; McIntyre, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Oakes, 1985; Valencia, 2010; Ibrahim Alladin, 1996; Kailen, 2002). One cannot and should not be apolitical in our society, and as educators, it is our duty to teach our students how to navigate through society and how to push against and deconstruct Dominant thinking. Included in this is how or whether or not we reflect upon and examine our own prejudices and biases – this is the basis of the hidden curriculum.

The hidden curriculum consists of the unexamined beliefs teachers hold of society, and their position within that society. Through these beliefs, teachers impact their students by their attitudes toward their students, and the kinds of practices they utilize in their classrooms. These beliefs are manifested through teacher practices, attitudes and behaviours, and they profoundly influence student achievement and most importantly, *they impact student self-confidence and self-worth*. These beliefs can and do effect teacher expectations of students' growth and can become self-perpetuating for the teacher in terms of being self-fulfilling prophecies. If teachers have low expectations for their students, almost always, the students do not achieve academically (St.Denis, 2008; Oakes, 1985; Freire, 2009).

Time after time we have seen history repeat itself in community schools as students fail to achieve academically. Many teachers continue to “teach” in a manner that impedes student success while they and the administrators blame the parents and students but never turn the lens toward themselves in order to examine their own culpability within a system which does not lend itself to examination and taking responsibility. Is this how we want our future and the future of our students to continue to unfold?

What does the future look like: “All education springs from some image of the future. If the image of the future held by a society is grossly inaccurate, its education system will betray its youth” (Toffler, 1974, p. 3). We have been, and still are, betraying our youth by not confronting and deconstructing racism within our schools. It is no wonder that so many of our Aboriginal students fail to achieve in school.

McDermott (1997) is very clear about how school failure works:

Every Monday morning through to every year's graduations, it is part of most every U.S. Citizen's work to help make school failure a cultural fact that is attended to, worried about, avoided, tested, resisted, paid for, remediated, explained, and condemned.
(McDermott, p. 111)

The same can be said for the community schools in which I have worked. Along with this, there is a strong, silent, subconscious sense of a class system and sense of entitlement running through some of these educational settings, which has been set in place by society. This harkens back to Anyon's (1980) class system and the sense of entitlement and privilege already mentioned which goes back to White, European settlers usurping the land. This too is part of the hidden curriculum – hidden to educators as well as to students, making it difficult to isolate, examine and address.

Haberman (2010) first noted this in 1958 in the United States, and his recent research says, “A teacher in an urban school of the 1990s who did not engage in these basic acts as the primary means of instruction would be regarded as deviant” (p. 1). By this, Haberman means that teachers in urban or community schools are expected to perform certain and specific teacher actions. Any deviation from the specific teacher actions by the teacher is considered to be counterproductive to learning. A proactive and progressive teacher who tries different teaching methods, or who disagrees with the way things are done in these kinds of schools is looked down upon for trying to make changes. In my

experience, these teachers are often told that, “We don’t do things that way.” Or, “Those ways of teaching kids don’t work in this kind of school.” Or, “These kids can’t learn with those teaching methods.” And even, “These kids can’t learn.”

We hear this same kind of talk whispered in some staffrooms of community schools and among some educators – that students living in poverty and our Indigenous, Metis, Inuit and New Canadian students - will not succeed, will drop out of school, and will perpetuate the welfare system. How teachers treat and teach their students is a reflection of how our society treats its Indigenous and Ethnic citizens. White teachers *cannot see that they are actually continuing to marginalize the very people they profess to help*. Not only that, certain schools, including community schools, often offer marginalized and regimented routines in place of actual, authentic learning and education.

Haberman (2010) makes it clear that any teacher trying to change the system will run into difficulty, especially in urban, or community schools. In fact, the basic teacher acts he specifies need to be in evidence to ‘prove’ a teacher is doing his/her job. “In most urban schools, not performing these acts for most of each day would be considered *prima facie* evidence of not teaching” (p.1). Some proactive, enlightened teachers who are trying to make a difference are encouraged by some colour-blind, racist fellow colleagues and administrators to toe the line. They are compelled to perform acts which are not teaching, but which, instead, lead to marginalizing students. Educators who choose to teach differently and try to address the systemic issues in education and in society, are looked upon as marginal teachers (Haberman, 2010).

I recently met a teacher who had been on probation for ten years because he refused to teach in the traditional Euro-centric ways. He insisted on having open-ended discussions in his class on societal issues, on racism and on the students’ perspectives of living in the prejudicial world. He worked diligently to find ways to help all of his students connect with one another, since they were from many

and varied backgrounds. He included much reflection, journal writing and class discussion in his classes and was told that he was not doing things properly, although, when polled at the end of each year, the students loved his class and claimed they had learned so much about the world and each other. This man taught in a school where the underlying belief was that the students were not capable of functioning with as much freedom from routine as he was giving them. He was describing his experience in a working class school.

Anyon (1980) describes four kinds of schools which each offer a different yet specific educational program to the students. These are working-class schools, middle-class schools, affluent professional schools, and executive elite schools. It is her working-class school model I am most interested in because it ties closely to the model used in some community schools and classrooms in Saskatchewan.

Anyon (1980) is very clear on social class and the agenda of schools in her article *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work*. She explores how students are ranked or separated into different classes and then are taught differently to support different kinds of society. She says that “public schools in complex industrial societies like our own make available different types of education experience and curriculum knowledge to students in different social classes” (p. 67). Low income and Indigenous students are not given the opportunity to experience rich and quality education that their richer counterparts are given and therefore do not have the chance to succeed and flourish.

In her research and study of these schools Anyon found that in the working-class school, “work is following the steps of a procedure. The procedure is usually mechanical, involving rote behavior and very little decision making or choice” (p. 73). The children were not taught how to think for themselves or be independent. “Teachers observed in the working-class schools attempted to control classroom time and space by making decisions without consulting the children and without explaining

the basis for their decisions” (p. 76). In my experience, the teachers do not teach the students how to function well in the classroom, but control them by the routines they provide. The students are not taught how to be independent or how to think on their own. Many teachers blindly fall into this kind of structure without realizing the harm they are doing to their students.

As well, classroom management often seemed to be an issue:

It is a constant struggle with the children. The children continually resist the teachers’ order and the work itself. They do not directly challenge the teachers’ authority or legitimacy, but they make indirect attempts to sabotage and resist the flow of assignments. (Anyon, 1980, p. 76)

Students held in such tight control do not learn how to handle their own behaviours. When I first went to a community school, I saw the kinds of activities other teachers used to control their students. Everything was about workbooks and worksheets. Students did very little group work, had no discussion time and spent most of their day sitting in their desks filling in blanks. I decided that I did not want to teach that way but I knew that having students in the middle years, I would have trouble teaching them how to work in groups.

I enlisted the help of the vice-principal and the teacher-librarian. We modeled, several times, what effective group work looked like, we also modeled ineffective group work, we made anchor charts of what quality group work looked and sounded like, then we tried it with the students.

There were four adults in the room the first day I had my students try group work. It was a very simple task of reading something together and discussing two questions. The emphasis was not on the reading but on working effectively within the group. Even with four adults in the classroom, it was bedlam for that time period, and the rest of the day was chaos as well. The students almost literally exploded – they had been held in such tightly controlled circumstances for so long.

I persevered with this, but I can see how some teachers – not as experienced as I, and not fully understanding why the rebellion and chaos was happening, would very quickly retreat back to the worksheets and control they have with this. I never really had the students exactly where I wanted them with group work, but we kept working on it because it was important to me and to them that they be able to function in this manner. Every student, no matter what their background, deserves to be treated respectfully and deserves the best education has to offer. Pre-selecting students for success or failure by streaming them should never be an option.

Jeannie Oakes (1985) calls this *tracking* students: “Tracking is the process whereby students are divided into categories so that they can be assigned in groups to various kinds of classes” (p. 3). She points out that not all categories or groups of students are valued in the same way.

A student in a high-achieving group is seen as a high-achieving person, bright, smart, quick, and in the eyes of many, good. And those in the low-achieving groups come to be called slow, below average, and – often when people are being less careful – dummies, sweatogs, or yahoos. (p, 3)

The students in my classes for the past ten years – students of community schools – are deemed the sweatogs and yahoos of education simply because they are from low economic backgrounds and are often of Aboriginal descent. They are held back because of their circumstances.

The students or their parents are often blamed for their disadvantaged state: “Seen as products of disorganized and deteriorating homes and family structures, poor and minority children have been thought of as unmotivated, noncompetitive, and culturally disadvantaged” (Oakes, 1985, p. 4). But Oakes points out that there is another perspective at play for these children:

For in the tracking process, it seems the odds are not quite equal. It turns out that those children who seem to have the least of everything in the rest of their lives most often get less at school as

well. (p. 4)

Teachers who are well-meaning and caring, but apolitical and steeped in systemic racism, fall easily into this way of ‘teaching.’ They do not think about what they are doing – many are unaware that they have an obligation to offer all students the very best they have to offer.

Oakes explores this further and explains why these children continue to be marginalized:

I think one reason is that a lot of what we do in schools is done more or less out of habit stemming from traditions in the school’s culture. These traditions dictate, for the most part, the ways in which schooling is organized and conducted. (p. 5)

Here, Oakes is referring, in part to the Euro-Centric way many schools and classrooms still function today. As educators, we sometimes do not think about why we are doing things, beyond the fact that it’s always been done that way. We do not consider the consequences wrought on the children we teach.

Complicit within teaching and perpetuating the norm and status quo, and complicating it as well, is the idea that teachers are good, innocent of wrong doing, and stand for justice and fairness for all (Palmer, 2007; Frankenberg, 1993; Goodlad and Klein, 1974). It is an image, a sense of who teachers are, remembering that many teachers are White middle-class women. It is an ideal they carry in their hearts, and they do not want to know that they might, in any way, not live up to this perfect but unrealistic picture. Indeed, many push back against anything which disrupts their false views, and refuse to even begin to examine or reflect on the presumptions upon which they have based their whole lives as good, kind and caring people (Palmer, 1998, 2007). Thus, we can see that the null and hidden curricula play a large part in dispensing hegemonic influences on educators and the children they teach.

Use of Books and Literature to Disrupt and Deconstruct Dominant Culture

Research informs us that the use of quality books within classrooms is a necessity, that children should read a lot and that there should be many, many book selections in the classroom (Allington & Cunningham, 1999; Routman, 2003; Gallagher, 2009; McEwan, 2004) in order to first, engage students, and then to increase student reading levels (Cunningham & Allington, 1999; Routman, 2003; Gallagher, 2009; McEwan, 2004). Research also indicates that much of the literature used in classrooms is representative of and supports hegemony and the Dominant Culture (Lindsey & Parsons, 2010). Books bring the world into the classroom and offer students the chance to explore many different cultures and places. Whether the teacher reads the books aloud – something I highly recommend in every grade level – or students read independently, the opportunity to read and share information from books greatly enhances learning and curiosity in students. And of equal importance, some of the literature can and should reflect a student's own background.

Children need to see themselves represented in the literature they read and in the books that are read aloud to them, yet they “have continued to be marginalized in the messages we send about our children and their families. There has always been and always will be, a need to use books as doors and window” (Lindsey & Parsons, p. 54). This refers back to Galda's (1998) research on stories and books as windows into other places and other lives and mirrors as reflections back into our own so that “reading allows readers the possibility of **transforming themselves** as well” (Galda, 1998, p. 3, bold-print original.) Literature can provide opportunities to “use books as windows into other lives, to emotionally educate our students about people, cultures, places and values that reflect the diversity of our country and our world” (Galda, 1998, p. 8).

Teachers need to read aloud and have discussions with students: “Every time we share a book with a class and discuss it, the book becomes a little bigger” (Galda, 1998, p. 3). Students who cannot

find themselves reflected or represented in the literature begin to feel further marginalized. It is essential that every student see him/herself within the pages of books. This does not mean that every story or read aloud needs to have every child's background or circumstances depicted, but over the course of several weeks and with several books and discussions, the students should be able to find themselves.

Teachers need to actively find books which explore the backgrounds and cultures of their students. These books should also be on display in the classroom for students to pick up during silent reading or in their free time. Following read alouds, teachers need to allow time for discussions, giving students the opportunity to share their opinions. This will go a long way in helping students begin to understand society and the systemic issues upon which our society functions at the moment. Hopefully this will aid in beginning to push against systemic barriers.

Disrupting and deconstructing deficit thinking and White dominance can and should begin with discussions around books and stories shared in the classrooms of our country: "Classrooms, and school and public libraries are pivotal places from which to disrupt the well-entrenched traditional paradigm of treating students as if they existed outside the constructed categories of race, class and gender (broadly defined)" (parenthesis original, MacNeill, 2010, p. 190). If we begin to make these most important books available to our students and then raise discussions in our classrooms around them, we have begun a very powerful movement which will crack open the dominant discourses of our schools. This will lead the way and give space and room for us to begin to construct the kinds of discourses and knowledge we need which will represent all people within a caring and accepting society.

Multicultural Education

Multicultural education in schools, especially community schools, often takes on the appearance of a fun night. It becomes a 'one-shot deal' in which various cultures are represented, as

already mentioned, through dinner, dance and dress. This can be a challenge for many Indigenous students whose families have lost their culture. St. Denis (2009) explores the challenges of teaching multicultural education in our schools. She speaks of First Nations educators who have lost their language and thus part of their culture and history, due to the tragic effects of Residential Schools on parents and grandparents. St. Denis argues that not only has their culture been lost, it has also been frozen in time by the way educators teach First Nation content in their classrooms. “This idea that Indian culture is 'lost' and that Indians have lost their culture is a deceptively benign but very common way to refer to the effects of colonial and racial oppression on Aboriginal people” (p.171). And so, in this way, White dominant culture and racism persists in education.

Both Orlowski (2011) and St. Denis (2008) explore the idea of denying race issues and racism in educational settings, which supports systemic on-going racism. Orlowski argues,

Sometimes systemic racism can be part of a seemingly benign situation. For example, the color-blind discourse that positions whiteness as the hegemonic norm is one example of how a non-White person's social circumstances, such as living in extreme poverty, can work against them going to a post-secondary institution for more education. (p. 80)

Therefore, the Dominant Culture perpetuates and continues on since much of society, whether White or not, sees this as the way things should be done.

St. Denis (2008) looks at what happens when racism is ignored. She says, “denial happens because of a refusal to acknowledge that oppression is real. Denying racism in education has many effects, including blaming the victim through psychologizing and individualizing the effects of systemic oppression” (p. 23). She adds that blaming the victim causes educators to separate and individualize the problem rather than looking at larger societal issues:

One example of focusing on the symptoms of the problem rather than the root cause is the oft

mentioned low self-esteem suffered by Aboriginal and Indian students in public schools. When we focus on low self-esteem, we are blaming the victim by individualizing and psychologizing the effects of systemic and structural discrimination. (p. 23)

When teachers and society blame the victim, they effectively wash their hands of any responsibility for changing the system. Racism then, becomes a negative cycle within which all of society is held captive since very few people seem to be able to think beyond what has been presented to them as hegemonic norms. Of course, it is the Indigenous and Ethnic students who suffer and continue to suffer within the norms of the Dominant Culture which permeate the classrooms and to which their teachers are blind.

We can see how this might happen as White teachers avoid reflecting on their beliefs. They are also apolitical, for the most part, and refuse to question the status quo. In reality, the teachers often push back in support of Dominant Culture order to remain “innocent” and “blameless” of all wrong doing within the constructs of Dominant White Society.

Students as Informants

There is much research, including the Spindlers’ (1988) study and of the work Goodlad (1974, 1997) and associates, which looks at students as informants. Students are intelligent, perceptive beings and they often have a finger on the pulse of their teacher, her/his actions and the classroom atmosphere.

As Richard Beswick (1990) reports:

An eight-year-old black girl in South Africa recently told Ted Koppel on *Nightline*, ‘White people are better than black people. Whites know more, have more, and get more. I wish I was white but I am not.’

American children of color do not have to contend with apartheid, but they still do not live in a prejudice-free society. A quarter century of desegregation has not yet solved the self-deprecation, low levels of educational performance, or overall quality of life for America's

people of color. Racism in any measure undermines children's self-esteem and erodes the educational process.

How tragic that children as young as this see themselves as *less than* in every way, just because of their skin colour. Students see themselves as not as important and not equal. Surely teachers – intelligent, educated and caring – can see past skin colour to the heart of the person.

The Spindlers' study. Spindler and Spindler (1988) did a study which asked teachers, principals and other professionals in a supervisory position, as well as the teacher's students, how a teacher ranked in terms of being approachable, helpful and supportive, etc. The results were most revealing. The Spindler study uncovered interesting presumptions teachers have about themselves. The study consisted of surveys and interviews with the participating teachers, their administrators and superintendents and students, as well as class observations, over several months. The teachers were rated in areas such as “discipline of the class, fairness in decisions, re: students, understand student problems, students like personality” (Spindler & Spindler, 1988 p. 5.).

The teachers and the administrators and superintendents held one view of the teachers' actions and classroom practices. However, *the students had a very different, more revealing and more accurate idea of how the teacher was actually interacting with them.* What it boils down to is *the teacher and his/her immediate supervisors are blind to what actually transpires in the classroom, which is the unconscious favouring of students who are most like the teacher.*

So, to add insult to injury, no one sees marginalizing and Othering behaviour but the students! Since it is “merely” the students who can call a spade a spade (no one else – teachers, administrators and superintendents – see biased and racist behaviour from the teachers involved.) It is difficult, if not impossible to have frank and honest discussions which would uncover these issues *because they are not visible and therefore do not exist!*

The Spindler study goes on to explain that it was not mistreatment of the students that the teacher was committing, but inattention. This is just as bad and equally prejudicial because it harkens to the philosophy that Indigenous students do not need the attention and help because they will not succeed anyway. It also definitely points to preferential treatment and the ‘selecting’ of students for success, already mentioned. As one parent pointed out, “But what happens is neglect. It's leaving people on their own too long and not being proactive in their development because you have low expectations and then asking why they aren't doing enough work” (Johnson, 2008). And so we see that teachers perpetuate racism by selecting students for success and ignoring or neglecting other students, and they and their supervisors (principals and superintendents) are unaware of the racism and streaming or tracking for success happening in classrooms and school every day.

Construct - Teachers as Good-Innocent-Caring Individuals

When we ask White teachers to reflect, to begin to question and disrupt the discourse of White dominance, we are asking them to *risk re-thinking and hopefully, reconstructing almost everything they know about themselves!* I would suggest that it is no wonder reflection and change are most often met with great resistance. It is far easier, much less painful, and in keeping with the norms of Dominant White Culture to deflect and refuse to examine ourselves and our hidden assumptions and presumptions.

To peel back the layers means to discover that White Dominant-Good-Kind-Teachers are actually *racially prejudiced!* This goes against the constructs of educators as ‘good’ and ‘caring’ and it rubs up against the Good-White-Dominant culture which produces as pure and innocent (Fanon, 2008; Tobani, 2007; Frankenberg, 1993; Thielen-Wilson, 2012). It's no wonder that teachers have an instinctive compulsion to bury this deeply within themselves so as not to disturb it. They are fearful of what they will find, and they are also fearful that they will be forced to confront the Other: “They (the

pre-service teachers) have a generalized fear of people of color – and about what to say about people of color – that is fed by white American's representation of the Other” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 73).

Some teachers need to feel that they can answer any question or comment put before them. They need to be able to stand at the front of the classroom and know that they are in control. These teachers do not want to be confronted with a discussion on racism or why Dominant Culture works for White people. They do not want to look too deeply at the injustices of the world and they do not want to bring that into their orderly classrooms. It is easier to mistakenly think that it is all left outside the classroom door when the school bell rings. In reality, it follows the teacher into the classroom and sits like the proverbial elephant, in the corner of the room, while the teacher tries unsuccessfully to teach around it. Like the elephant and Pandora’s Box, the teacher is fearful to poke and prod too deeply at these invisible issues.

Palmer (2007) weighs in on this conversation about White Culture and fear as well:

The fear [is] that a live encounter with otherness will challenge or even compel us to change our lives. This is not paranoia: the world really is out to get us! Otherness, taken seriously, always invites transformation, calling us not only to new facts and theories and values but also to new ways of living our lives – and *that is the most daunting threat of all*. (italics added for emphasis, p. 37)

It is no wonder, then, that teachers, and White Dominant Culture, in general, instinctively fear anything which begins to disrupt and uncover deeply buried realities of White Dominance and White Privilege in society. Teaching is so embroiled in the societal norms of White Dominant Culture and the construct of the Good-Kind teacher, that to reflect and disrupt the discourse is to risk peeling away masks which have been in place for hundreds of years in society, and which in individuals, are the building blocks upon which personality and values have been constructed. How then do we begin to

deconstruct these enormous issues? They permeate our schools and classrooms and tragically, affect our students in the most negative of ways. Perhaps because of this fear or the need to keep the status quo, teachers can be seen to become stricter and less forgiving of Indigenous and Ethnic students.

As reported in the *Daily Times*, published by Delco Times in Delaware, Pennsylvania on Sunday, March, 11, 2012:

There is a place in this country where black people are routinely treated worse, disciplined more harshly and punished more severely than their white counterparts. The place: America's public schools. At least that is what the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights announced last week. 'The sad fact is that minority students across America face much harsher discipline than non-minorities, even within the same school,' said Education Secretary Anne Duncan. (Spencer, G., 2012)

How sad and tragic to realize that teachers are maligning the very students they profess to work so hard to help. I have witnessed this sort of teacher behaviour where teachers comment that the students need to learn the ways of society. They sometimes say or imply, that's the way life is so the students have to just 'get used' to it.

St. Denis (2008) explains that First Nations students are often maligned at school, treated unfairly, falsely blamed for problems that arise and are often dealt with more harshly than students of the Dominant Culture, to the detriment of the students: "There is an unfair and rigid application of school rules and procedures that enables and encourages 'dropping out' among students" (p. 25).

How tragic to realize that this is true across the United States, and Canada as well. Many – I would say - most teachers have constructed a 'good and-caring; teacher role for themselves, and yet continue to destroy, or at least seriously damage students' self-esteem, self-confidence and academic success. Many teachers contribute to systemic racism, rather than disrupt and push against its

constructs.

Teachers as Perpetuators of Euro-Centric Teaching Methods

In the late 1920s when Dewey (1929) wrote about the teacher as facilitator in the classroom, he thought the 'talking-head'/lecture mode of teaching - the authoritarian, controlling teacher - was already antiquated. *Many teachers teach as if they are stuck in the past.* Dewey was a man well ahead of his time, and we can still learn a lot from his research and thoughts on education:

Much of present education fails because it neglects this fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life. It conceives the school as a place where certain information is to be given, where certain lessons are to be learned, or where certain habits are to be formed. (p. 36)

Some teachers still teach in this way, and more so in community schools, where it is perceived that students – Indigenous and Ethnic - need more discipline and control in order to help them learn. It can also be the case, that teachers like routine and tradition and do not question why certain things are done.

The more the teacher fears the students of colour and fears that they might 'act out,' the more tightly she grips the reins of control. The students are kept in their desks, not taught how to, or given the opportunity to work and learn in groups. They follow the routines as described by Anyon and Oakes in working class schools and are not given the opportunity to learn how to think independently and creatively. They do not have the opportunity to become the critical thinkers Orlowski (2011) mentions. Learning is not fun and exciting, as it can and should be! It is not taught by an excited teacher who is enthusiastic about the way she is bringing knowledge to her students. How boring and long the days must be for the both the students and the teacher!

Part of the reason for this, Oakes (1985) says, is that “many school practices seem to be the natural way to conduct schooling, an integral part of the way schools are. As a result we don’t tend to

think critically about much of what goes on” (p. 5). She adds that part of the problem is that we take these old ‘tried and true’ practices as the end all and be all of teaching practices:

I think they are taken so seriously that we can hardly conceive any alternatives to them. We have deep-seated beliefs and long-held assumptions about the appropriateness of what we do in schools. These beliefs are so ingrained in our thinking and behavior – so much a part of the school culture – that we rarely submit them to careful scrutiny. (p. 5)

Teachers do not question too deeply why certain tasks such as streaming are performed, nor do they question which students are streamed. They mistakenly think that by removing students from regular classroom instruction they are providing them with better education. Students though, perceive it for what it is, a prejudicial act which actually interferes with their education.

It is also evident that most teachers teach as they were taught, not as they were taught to teach (Goodlad, 1997). Teachers go to university, learn many new strategies in order to engage and empower their students, as well as ways to foster a learning community within their classroom; and when they finally get in front of the classroom for the first time, in many cases, they inevitably fall back on teaching the way they were taught, and keep teaching that way! “Teachers must resist the temptation to impose their own idiosyncratic learning styles or those methods which characterized their own favourite teachers” (Goodlad, & Klein, 1974 p. 11). Perhaps some teachers become teachers because they like the sense of control they have in the room. Perhaps they like the idea that they can teach the same novels they loved as students, whether this is relevant to their students or not. This would make an interesting study but is not the focus of this research. Some teachers do not want to, or are afraid to push against the already ‘well-oiled’ machine of institutional education that has many layers.

Haberman (2010) reminds us that this issue has many layers. Haberman asks, “Why is a ‘minor’ issue like improving the quality of urban teaching generally overlooked by the popular reform

and restructuring strategies?” He then goes on to list three valid reasons, although I suggest that he is writing using veiled sarcasm and speaking tongue-in-cheek to make his point. He first explores the idea that schools and teaching are ubiquitous in our society. Not only does most everyone in the general public feel that they know exactly what school and teaching is, but most feel they can point to their own experience and speak authoritatively about it.

No matter where you go these days, most people have an opinion about what school and teaching is about and should be about, and I would suggest that most of these people believe that the Euro-centric, authoritarian kind of teaching is the best. I would hazard to add that most also believe that students are getting away with too much these days and need more of this traditional kind of teaching that Dewey argues against. I also suggest that the ‘general public’, including community school association members, school trustees, school board members and politicians, to name a few, speak vocally and make decisions about schools and teaching based on their limited knowledge. In other words, I would suggest that bad decisions are often made by people in power who think they know everything about schools and teaching.

Most people believe that “we would all know good teaching if we saw it” (Haberman, p. 1). As already stated, although most people may have an opinion about school and teaching because of their own experiences, and do speak with authority on the subject, most do not have a realistic picture of what good teaching is really about. I suggest that many people think that the authoritarian model of teaching is good teaching, believing that many teachers are not strict enough with their students.

I suggest Haberman’s second point is that most teachers are resistant or reluctant to change and that “there must be other, more potent, teacher-proof strategies for change.” Again, I suggest Haberman is using sarcasm to make the point that decisions made about schools and teachers are most often made by those who have no idea what good teachers or good teaching looks like and they are

made to force teachers to conform to some societal norm of educational practice.

Third, Haberman (2010) is speaking about Valencia's (2010) deficit thinking model of blaming the victim for their problems. Again, I would suggest he is writing tongue-in-cheek as he expresses his angst that the general public, and again, the governing bodies who make decisions believe children of poverty cannot learn because they are "affected primarily by their socioeconomic class" (p.1). Here, I suggest that he is also reminding us that some teachers, due to normative societal perceptions, blame the victim as well for their failure to achieve in school.

Haberman's statements are very strong and thought-provoking, as we think of inner city and community schools in Canada and in particular in the urban cities in Saskatchewan. My ten years' experience in community schools has shown that Haberman is still very accurate in the ways teachers teach in the new millennia. Things have not changed much in community schools in the way some teachers deliver instruction to their students. One will see students sitting primarily in rows, provided very little group work or discussion, and working individually and usually on worksheets. Is this the best education has to offer?

The Goodlad and Klein (1974) research discussed below is still a truthful depiction of how some teachers in community schools are still teaching. I would suggest it was the best research for this thesis. It connected most closely with the experiences I have had with community schools as it depicted the kinds of teacher actions I witnessed in some of the community school classrooms in which I was involved.

Goodlad and Klein (1974) and several other researchers conducted studies in over 150 classrooms in over 65 schools over a period of several months, from kindergarten to grade three. The schools were "classified as enrolling a large proportion of disadvantaged children" (p.39). Although the literature does not define or explain the use of the term 'disadvantaged children', it does talk about

the high number of schools involved lunch and nutrition programs, and other state and local funding programs, as well as being urban schools.

The equivalent programs to HeadStart I am familiar with in Saskatchewan are Pre-School and Full-Day Kindergarten in which students in the community school areas, as well as some other areas, are brought into school at ages three and four. The teachers begin teaching the students some literacy skills so that when they enter kindergarten they will be on par with other students in more affluent areas and ready to learn to read and write. From this one can conclude that the schools mentioned in the above research enrolled a high percentage of Indigenous students and/or minority and low socio-economic students. Therefore, these schools were urban, or community or inner city schools.

The schools were varied, some with large populations, some with small, but most in urban areas. The researchers observed in these classrooms. Their findings were evidence that schools have not changed much since Dewey wrote about archaic teaching methods at the beginning of the Twentieth Century!

We conclude that most of the schools visited were oriented to some generally accepted concept of what school is (a school is a school is a school) and not to an ongoing inquiry into either group or individual learning needs of specific children in particular communities” (Goodlad & Klein, 1974, p.78).

The researchers concluded that “the instructional environment of the classes we visited...were characterized by telling, teachers' questioning individual children in group settings, and an enormous amount of seemingly quite routine seatwork” (p.79). Children that were unmotivated by worksheets quickly became disengaged at this very young age, at a time when school should be fun and exciting. Who can blame them? Many active and exciting learning opportunities should be offered to all students, regardless of race, creed and/or class.

Even more telling, was the design of class management: “In regard to this matter of control, our data suggested somewhat less freedom for children and the use of firmer control mechanisms in classrooms enrolling large percentages of environmentally disadvantaged children” (Goodlad & Klein, p. 92). So in classrooms with high percentage of disadvantaged students, we find students stuck in desks. They have strictly limited group learning experiences and tight classroom management procedures are forced upon them. This limits their freedom, their creativity and their ability to think and learn independently, which in turn leads to disengagement and disempowerment. And the teachers seem unwilling or unable, and perhaps even unaware that change was and is necessary.

These classrooms harken back to Anyon’s (1980) working class schools where the seatwork students are given is “easy, that is, not demanding, and thus receives less resistance” (p. 77). Oakes (1985) reminds us that:

...the legacy of the factory model remains strong. In assembly-line fashion, schools still separate students into classes by age, grade, and ability. Most teachers teach all of the students in the room simultaneously – the same material at the same pace in the same way. (p. 100)

Furthermore, this kind of teaching happens because of the class system in which the educational institution is enmeshed. “Social and economic class are important aspects of identity and they structure students’ schooling experiences and outcomes” (Oakes, Lipton, Anderson & Stillman, 2013, p. 10). Indeed, students’ success or failure in school has a lot to do with low teacher expectations as well as the class structure of educational institutes and therefore the way students are taught (Oakes et al, 2013; Oakes 1985; Anyon, 1980). Many teachers are blind to what is actually transpiring in their classrooms.

Goodlad and Klein’s (1974) conclusion was:

Our elementary schools are not exciting learning centers, using a variety of pedagogical techniques, subject matter, materials, and activities designed to promote effective

learning in most pupils. Especially, they seem not to be organized and conducted so as to assure a love of learning and development of the skills needed for lifelong-learning. (p.99)

This scenario is carried out day after day, year after year, in schools in Saskatchewan as well. Students of colour as well as children living in poverty are subjected to 'routine seatwork' which amounts to page after page of worksheets designed more as a method of classroom control than for any kind of learning. This scenario aligns itself well with what Oakes (1985) calls the tracking of students, and Anyon (1980) more clearly states that these schools are purposeful in their intent to stream children for future jobs in society.

Instead school is tedious and brain-numbing for many, and it is abundantly clear that the *Pedagogy of Poverty* (Haberman, 2010) is being actively encouraged and enforced in these schools. The outcome is, many students quit caring and quit thinking. The marginalized students are further marginalized: “The schools appear unwilling or unable (or both) to break away from their essentially middleclass orientation...the system is geared to self-preservation, not to self-renewal” (Goodland & Klein, 1974, p. 100).

Some teachers are afraid to take risks, afraid to release the reins of control even a little bit, afraid to confront their own deeply hidden fears and beliefs about the students they “teach”. Other teachers continue to use practices which actually malign students because they are unaware that things should change and have not reflected deeply on what they are actually doing in their classrooms with their students. Oakes (1985) reminds us that not playing close attention – not reflecting on what and how we teach, and the common practices and policies we have in place in schools is a gateway to disaster: “I think this uncritical, unreflective attitude gets us into trouble. It permits us to act in ways contrary to our intentions” (p. 5). This, unreflective stance and practice can have detrimental effects on

our students.

Tragically, systemic racism thrives in these educational institutions while teachers like Mrs. Bossey and Mr. Dampour, whose teaching experiences were written about in chapter one of this research, continue to 'teach' and students of colour continue to fail at school (St. Denis, 2008; Oakes, 1985; McIntyre, 1997; Valencia, 2010). Nothing of any substance is done to address any or all of these problems and issues. Year after year, many schools and teachers continue to hurt and malign students, their futures and their families, and one has to wonder why many things remain the same.

One suggestion from research is that deep down, teachers work from a place of fear. "Fear is what distances us from our colleagues, our students, our subjects, ourselves. Fear shuts down those 'experiments with truth' that allows us to weave a wider web of connectedness--and thus shuts down our capacity to teach as well" (Palmer, 2007, p.36). He explores the idea of a true teacher as one who can be vulnerable and real with his/her students, removing all masks, facades and/or layers which may block the connectedness. I suggest that many teachers have not reflected enough nor explored their own feelings enough to first realize that fear is an issue and then begin to scratch at the masks and layers which create vast distances between them and their students. Many teachers do not realize what real soul-to-soul teaching is all about.

Palmer also reminds us that "teachers possess the power to create conditions that can help students learn a great deal – or keep them from learning much at all" (p. 7). This is exactly what I have noticed in the schools I have worked in over the years. How many teachers, in the name of 'education,' keep the students from learning? Yet, in some misguided way, many *assume they are meeting every child's need?!*

"Teaching is the intentional act of creating those conditions, and good teaching requires that we understand the inner sources of both the intent and the act" (Palmer, p. 7). Teaching is also joy-filled,

especially if one is engaging and empowering students to learn! The classroom reflects those feelings and becomes a happy, safe and thriving environment for students and the teacher, if the teacher is intentionally reaching and teaching her students. Both Dewey and Palmer talk about the connectedness of good teachers, to themselves, their students and the subjects. “[M]y ability to connect with my students, and to connect them with the subject, depends less on the methods I use *than on the degree to which I know and trust my selfhood*” (italics added for emphasis, Palmer, 2007, p. 10). In this case, Palmer uses the word ‘selfhood’ with reference to his inner most thoughts, his personality and his soul. He believes, as do I, that the best teaching stems from teacher to student bonding and connectedness. It happens when teachers know themselves, understand and challenge the fears they may live with, and work to remove them. Teachers are then able to be open and vulnerable with their students and to meet them heart to heart and soul to soul.

So, we begin see how everything is interwoven and connected. A good teacher needs to be 'real', genuine and vulnerable in the classroom, finding ways to relate to and connect to the students in meaningful and respectful ways, while at the same time engaging them in relevant and exciting teaching/learning opportunities, *regardless of the skin colour and perceived learning dis/abilities*. As well, the teacher needs to understand how Dominant Culture operates to continue to marginalize students, and understand the part he/she plays in racism.

Palmer and Freire talk about empowering and engaging people. “To educate is to guide students on an inner journey toward more truthful ways of seeing and being in the world” (Palmer, 2007, p. 6). Freire (2009) says, “Authentic education is not carried on by 'A' *for* 'B' or b 'A' *about* 'B', but rather by 'A' *with* 'B', mediated by the world – a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it” (p. 150).

Deconstructing White Dominance and Antiracist Education

So, as I have stated, White Dominance has been on-going for hundreds of years. It is no surprise that white people have so blindly fallen in line with prejudicial and discriminatory beliefs and attitudes, and they continue to blame the victim (Valencia, 2010; St. Denis, 2008; Orlowski, 2011; Kailen, 2002). Valencia's work centres on examining and debunking the myths of white racial superiority. He endeavours to:

examine the ongoing social construction of deficit thinking as seen in the three endogenous variants of the paradigm – the genetic pathology model, the culture of poverty model, and the marginalization of poor students and students of color – and their families. (p. xv)

Strongly rooted in critical pedagogy, Valencia defines deficit thinking then deconstructs the false paradigm of white superiority, to prove that there is no basis for the continued failure of Indigenous students within American educational institutions. He underscores the point that white society often, “organize(s) schools to exclude students of color from optimal learning by not making available equal educational opportunities” (p. xv). This ties into what Oakes (1985) talks about as the streaming or tracking students by offering different educational experiences. I point out that these experiences are often lesser for minority students. It also ties into Anyon’s (1980) research on the class system of education, specifically, students of working class schools are provided fewer and less rich and varied school experiences and therefore their education is compromised.

Valencia (2010) examines the history of how deficit thinking was constructed, beginning with school failure and theories as to why students of colour in the United States continue to fail. He lists “six characteristics of deficit thinking: victim blaming, oppression, pseudoscience (in which researchers are already so biased and prejudicial before beginning their research that their results are very flawed) temporal changes, educability and heterodoxy” (p. 18). Valencia briefly explains each of

these models of deficit thinking and gives relevant historical information, debunking the myths.

Although the book is based on research of Mexican American and African American students of the United States, its importance reaches northward to Canada and Saskatchewan, where students of colour (First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Ethnic) continue to struggle against a predominantly White educational system which marginalizes and Others them, and they continue to fail at school. His work disrupts the discourse that white intelligence is superior to people of colour, that although poverty is an issue and a challenge to students, it does not necessarily impact their intellect and future outcomes. He also gives credence to the claim that Euro-centric White Dominant Society continues to malign students and has a negative impact on the learning and educational success of students of colour.

St. Denis (2008) is very specific in how to teach anti-oppressive education, saying, it “involves examining how multiple forms of oppression and marginalization rely on similar processes, practices and ideologies to naturalize and normalize violence against particular groups of people in our society” (p. 16). Racialization “is a concept that brings attention to how race had been and is continually used to justify inequality and oppression of minority groups, such as Aboriginal peoples in Canada.” She adds that “anti-racist education involves studying and analyzing the practices, processes, and ideologies of racialization, which includes a study of how whiteness gets produced and constructed as superior and normal” (p. 16).

St. Denis (2008) says there are at least four effects of racism on Aboriginal students. First, the students “report that they are socially marginalized and isolated, which leads to a feeling that they do not belong in places of learning.” She adds, that the Aboriginal students “do not believe their teachers care for them, but rather have contempt for them” (p. 25). She also explores the idea that school rules do not apply equally to all students. She points out too, that “race matters in how value and worth is assigned to individuals and/or groups of people, and race is also evident in the unequal distribution of

power and privilege” (p. 17).

St. Denis also explores the idea that teachers have low expectations for Aboriginal students and that this “justifies lack of instruction and attention to Aboriginal and Indian students” (p. 25). It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that the teachers make about the success their Indigenous students will have – a prophecy of an endless negative cycle that is racist and keeps the Dominant Culture and Discourse in our schools alive and strong. I would suggest that low teacher expectations for students is a key factor in why many students continue to achieve failure in schools. Students know and can feel when teachers do not believe they can succeed and they either lose confidence in themselves as learners and/or they shut down in order to try to remove themselves from a negative atmosphere.

Social Justice and Social Action (Kailin, 2002; Valencia, 2010; Cowhey, 2006; Provost Turchetti, 2004) are important in engaging students and helping them become active participants in how our world operates. “Social justice learning starts with recognizing others as ourselves, for otherwise, one person’s social justice can be another person’s injustice” (Provost Turchetti, 2004, p. 135.). Valencia (2010) explains the beginning of social justice in the 1990’s as a result of poor academic success of students of colour:

First, the area of social justice focuses not only on the characteristics of the educational leader (typically the school principal), but also very much how to bring about institutional change.

Second, the social justice area, although emphasizing race and class concerns, is more inclusive, covering other marginalized groups. (i.e., gender; disability; language; sexual orientation). (p. 139)

The literature also compares and contrasts the roles of antiracist education and that of multicultural education, using St. Denis’ (2007) concept of multicultural education as taking the dance, dress and diet of a people frozen in the past, rather than confronting and dealing with today’s

Indigenous person and challenges. I would suggest that this is where Antiracist education and multiculturalism part company. (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997) Teachers who teach antiracist education understand that social justice and social action must be part of the learning loop – that teachers and students must strive to make a difference – to better the world for themselves and others. Multiculturalism stops short of this, tending to teach the dinner, dance and dress or cultures but not addressing the issue of power within the Dominant culture. Many teachers are reluctant to, or perhaps do not know how to teach past this to the deeper social issues which continue to need to be addressed. As well, although Social Justice aims to make changes, starting with the principals of schools, it is difficult to make those changes when individuals can see neither their own culpability nor that of their teachers and support staff. The added professional development is deemed useless and non-consequential. It is quickly parked on a shelf somewhere and forgotten.

Research also explores the ideas of antiracist education and multicultural education:

The purpose of this education is to influence change. These aims also cause antiracist education to be viewed differently from multicultural education. Where multiculturalism is aimed at the tolerance and appreciation of differing cultures, the development of esteem, and the reduction of ignorance, antiracist education is directed at exposing, defining and transforming power relationships, through equality, justice, and emancipation. (Ibrahim Alladin, 1996, p. 162)

Kincheloe (2008) explores critical pedagogy and schools as political places.

Adherents to critical pedagogy “understand that every dimension of schooling and every form of educational practice are politically contested spaces. Shaped by history and challenged by a wide range of interest groups, educational practice is a fuzzy concept as it takes place in numerous settings, is shaped by a plethora of often invisible forces and

can operate even in the name of democracy and justice to be totalitarian and oppressive.” (p. 2)

Further, “teachers have trouble with this political dimension and the basic notion that schooling can be hurtful to particular students” (p. 2).

Many educators have come to avoid the use of the term ‘tolerance’ feeling that it is constructed as continued negative feelings and White Dominant patronizing. We have already seen how multicultural education can be misconstrued, misjudged and mistrusted by teachers (St. Denis, 2007).

Compton-Lilly (2004) examines assumptions teachers, principals and society makes about people of colour who are living in poverty. Some assumptions are that the parents don’t value education, don’t care about their children and don’t help their children learn how to read (p. 8). She disrupts these presumptions, and comes to the conclusion that as educators

...we must strive to reach beyond the assumptions that society has taught us throughout our lives. We must strive to recognize the contributions of parents in ways that respect their experiences and their lives. As literacy teachers, we have an extra charge – we must confront and challenge the myths that exist about poor, diverse families relative to literacy. (p. 51)

As a consequence of the teacher’s beliefs, practices and attitudes, the students will indeed suffer and do poorly in school. *The teacher will blame it on the family issues or the family background. She will wash her hands of her own responsibility and will never see that she was very complicit in marginalizing and objectifying these students.*

Students, of course, are at the mercy of their teachers. When teachers bring to the classroom their own unexamined, hidden and null agendas, they often view the students of colour as unteachable, unreachable and disrespectful (Lewis and Solorzano, 2006). In actuality, these students are constructed this way by their teachers and are acting out in direct response and in opposition to the teacher's

attitudes and behaviours. The students are labeled, passed on without learning anything and eventually drop out of school because they get so far behind.

Indigenous students are often treated worse than their White classmates (Spindler & Spindler, 1988; St. Denis, 2009). They are given harsher and unfair treatment. “Not only are rules often rigidly and unfairly applied to Aboriginal students, but Aboriginal students are often subjected to harsher penalties than racially dominant student.” (St. Denis, 2009, p. 175). And with this, the undercurrent of unrest and rebellion seems to seethe and fester.

Anyon (1980) addresses this issue of taught non-compliance and rebellion as well:

The working-class children are developing a potential conflict relationship with capital. Their present school work is appropriate preparation for future wage labor that is mechanical and routine. Such work, insofar as it denies the human capacities for creativity and planning, is degrading. (p. 88)

So, as teachers, holding on tightly to the reins of control in the classroom, sticking to boring and basic routines, we are depriving our children of the natural excitement that comes from learning. We are denying their creativity and teaching them that they don't need to know how to think for themselves. Even more disturbing, though, are teachers inadvertently teaching children to rebel against authority? According to Anyon (1980) the students, “are developing abilities and skills of resistance. These methods are highly similar to the ‘slowdown,’ subtle sabotage and other modes of indirect resistance” (p.88). In my experience, in classrooms where the reigns of control are held so tightly, there simmers an undercurrent of unrest. I would suggest that many students in these types of classrooms feel disrespected, feel undervalued and feel that the teacher does not care about them. This might produce a feeling of rebellion against authority. Obviously this is not good for the students, and ultimately, it is not good for society. How can we stop teaching in these hurtful ways?

Freire (2009) speaks of love as “an act of courage, not of fear” (p. 148). Palmer (2007) speaks of the courage to teach. Freire's love is about empowering people, which is what teaching is all about. Teaching is an act of love. Therefore, we can substitute the word 'teaching' where Freire uses love: “Because teaching is an act of courage, not of fear, teaching is commitment to other men. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of teaching is commitment to their cause – the cause of liberation” (p. 148). Liberation from oppression, from perpetual systemic racism, from poor and detrimental educational policies and practices which keep students of colour locked in oppression.

Chapter Summary

The research informs us that Canadian society, our educational system and educators are steeped in White Dominant Societal beliefs and practices. Much of the way schools and indeed, classrooms operate are Euro-Centric in nature and their functionality conspires to select students for success while disempowering and disengaging students of colour, including the First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Ethnic students. We see that teachers, mostly White middle-class women, are not aware of their complicit-ness in perpetuating racism. They are blind to their own on-going systemic, racist beliefs, which negatively impact their teaching practices and procedures, as well as their beliefs about what our First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Ethnic students can actually accomplish. They are also steeped in old practices and have not reflected on the merits or demerits of such practices, on their students.

Hence, educators continue to marginalize and Other Ethnic students, and *do not even realize they are doing it!* We also see that teachers and society constructs educators as good, honest, caring individuals, and that being White and White privilege goes unnamed and is therefore invisible and untouchable. This prohibits teachers from examining their own prejudicial beliefs, attitudes and practices. Many teachers cannot even fathom that some of their classroom behaviours are capable of maligning children, when evidence clearly shows that it happens.

Racism in schools is often subtle and subversive – so invisible that it goes unnoticed and unquestioned by teachers, administrators and superintendents. Many teachers also continue to use outdated Euro-Centric teaching methods which do not engage students in learning but add to the selection for success process. Current research is not flowing into the classrooms and changes to teaching practices are not being made. Literature around the importance of students seeing themselves in books (Galda, 1998; MacNeill, 2010; Lindsey & Parsons, 2010) is evident, but what are actual practices in the classroom? Although Antiracist education, Multicultural education and curriculum reform and renewal are making some changes, *it is not enough*. It is not getting at the crux of the problem, which is to obliterate racism within our classrooms. Where do we go from here?

The Missing Link?

The literature suggests that in-services and workshops designed to help teachers begin to deconstruct White Dominance and Euro-Centric beliefs are helpful (Kailen, 2002; McIntyre, 1997; Ibrahim Alladin, 1996) and the philosophy behind this is sound (Valencia, 2010; Freire, 2009). It also points out ways to think about and change how we teach Multicultural Education (St. Denis, 2007, 2009) and that of altering and reforming the curriculum (Battiste, 2004; Orlowski, 2011) so that teachers begin to teach toward social action and social justice. Research has also been noted which documents the racist practices of teachers and the impact it has on students (Spindler & Spindler, 1988; McIntyre, 1997; Anyon, 1980; Oakes, 1985).

What the research doesn't appear to do is explore the White teachers who have figured out how to reach and teach their students; teachers who push against Dominant Culture and the structures of educational institutions which work to help students achieve failure; teachers who have engaged students and impacted their learning and their academic success in positive ways. Studies need to be done in the area of how some White teachers have managed to 'crack the racist' code and are

empowering their students to feel confident, competent, and successful. Their students are learning, and both the students and their teachers feel good about this success!

What are these teachers' secrets and can they be duplicated? Will learning what some teachers are doing successfully in their classrooms help other teachers begin to deconstruct their own racist beliefs, attitudes and practices? How is literature and the availability of good quality books, read-alouds and discussions a factor? The literature has not yet provided answers. Current research has not been pursued, which investigates the enlightened teacher as a means of discovering how to successfully implement exciting, cohesive, thoughtful learning environments which are engaging and respectful of all students including the First Nations, Inuit, students, Métis and Ethnic students. In thinking about teaching and teachers, "They forget that their fundamental objective is to fight alongside the people for the recovery of the people's stolen humanity, not to 'win the people over' to their side" (Freire, 2009, p. 150).

Teaching is dialogue. It is the ability, the need, the desire for open and honest communication among and between all people, especially the students in the classroom. "[D]ialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence...true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking" (Freire, 2009, p. 149). How can we open teachers' minds and hearts to really examine their beliefs, attitudes and practices in order to engage and empower all students? What are the enlightened teachers, the ones who are succeeding in helping motivate and empower *all* students already doing, and doing well?

Chapter Three:

Method and Methodology of the Research

Although there is much research on Social Justice and Social Action (Cowhey, 2006; Kailen, 2002; Valencia, 2010) as a means to debunk White Dominant constructs of educators, as well as literature supporting professional development topics such as Multicultural Education and Cultural Responsiveness (St. Denis, 2007, 2009; Battiste, 2004, 2011) they do not examine actual classroom practices, nor how to actually change teachers' beliefs, practices and attitudes which impact First Nations, Inuit and Métis students. There is also research to indicate that curricula are changing in order to teach about Indigenous people from a more progressive and proactive stance (Battiste, 2004, 2011; St. Dennis, 2007, 2009). However, there is no indication or direction of how to push back against the constructs of White Dominance in order to help facilitate much needed change.

Purpose

This research comes from a basis of narrative inquiry. Its purpose is to discover, through the use of questions to elicit stories, what some teachers are doing differently in their classes which helps all students, including First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Ethnic students, be engaged, motivated and successful in their academic lives. Narrative inquiry, as defined by Gall, Gall and Borg (2007) is “a representation and explanation of social reality that is communicated through various story structures [e.g. folktales and anecdotes.] A collective term for the methods developed by scholars in various qualitative research traditions involving the study of lived experience and narratives.” (p. 645).

As a professional development leader for Saskatoon Public Schools for the past ten years, mainly working in the core or community schools, I have been in classrooms (my own included) and witnessed how some teachers have figured out how to help all students succeed no matter the colour of their skin. In these classrooms, students are engaged, motivated and learning, even though they often

come from low socioeconomic homes and from a culture of poverty. These teachers have overcome the racism so prevalent in society and found ways to have authentic relationships with their students. This led me to wonder what these successful teachers - these 'transformed' teachers - are doing differently. There is much research to support this issue as a current, critical educational challenge which needs to be addressed.

Research Design

I have spent much of my teaching career in community schools working with students who were predominantly First Nations, Métis and people of colour. I have watched many students struggle against oppression, and White Dominant beliefs, attitudes and old-fashioned practices of many classroom teachers, which have continued to marginalize and malign our Indigenous students. I have also watched some teachers wring their hands in obvious distress. These teachers are blind to what is happening and do not know how to reach and teach students who are already disengaged and dis-empowered. Many teachers finally give up because they don't understand the history of White dominant culture and its continuing impact on teachers, students, the educational institutions, and society, in general.

Additionally, I have also witnessed other teachers, myself included, working against many invisible barriers from colleagues and society, to find ways to positively impact student engagement and learning in their classrooms. Yet, as a consultant, I have often been unable to break the invisible boundaries of White Dominance to help other teachers begin to relinquish old ways, attitudes and beliefs and become successful in their classrooms. Perhaps by looking at what successful, 'transformed' teachers are doing, we can finally begin to break down the walls and barriers of prejudice and oppression and begin to crack the code of White Dominance within our schools and classrooms in order to successfully impact all students.

For my action research, I used a constructivist methodology which is, “based on the assumption that social reality is constructed by the individuals who participate in it” (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 21). This allowed me to participate in the study as well. “[S]ome researchers make explicit their constructivist role...by writing research reports in which they play a key role alongside their research participants” (p.24). This is termed ‘reflexivity’, which is “the researcher’s act of focusing on himself or herself as a constructor and interpreter of the social reality being studied” (p. 651).

I will also turn to portraiture as a way and means of searching my insights and the results of the study. “Portraiture, on the other hand, permits the same inclinations to flourish, admits the shaping hand of the artist, and is less concerned with anticipated problems of replication...portraits seek to capture the insiders’ views of what is important” (Lightfoot, 1983, p. 14). My reasoning for the use of portraiture is that story can and does have a profound effect and impact on the individual. We are moved and touched emotionally by stories.

I will also use Haberman’s (2010) concept of the ‘Exemplary’ teacher as a framework for this research. How do the teachers I interview align with Haberman’s idea of the kind of teachers needed in urban or community schools? I will also compare my list of criteria for what I consider a true or genuine teacher, to examine how my criteria compares to that of Haberman.

Research Methods

The method of the study will be qualitative research, which is inquiry-based and constructs reality, examining causal effects, “by studying cases intently in natural settings and by subjecting the resulting data to analytic induction” (Gall, Gall & Borg, p. 650). The research will be based on the self-selection of five teachers within my circle of colleagues whom I have identified as real, genuine teachers who have also witnessed the academic success of First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Ethnic students. In my experience, success for students is defined as students who are actively engaged in

their learning. They can talk about what they are learning and why it is important to them. They can show how they know what they know, whether through writing, pictures, a project and/or orally. They can also set goals for themselves and actively work toward achieving them. Anne Davies (2007) has long been a proponent of the kind of active learning and teaching where the teacher and students work in partnership. She first describes how teachers need to be familiar with the curriculum objectives and be able to clearly state them so that they understand what they need to teach and what the students need to learn:

“Teachers work with the students to bring them into the assessment process. They do this by talking about the learning, showing samples and discussing what the evidence might look like, setting criteria with students, engaging in activities such as self-assessment, peer assessment, goal-setting and collecting evidence or proof of their learning to deepen their understanding. (p. 4)

When students are actively engaged in their own learning, when teachers plan their lessons to help students learn, this spells success. Students become partners with the teacher – the power and control are more in balance. Mutual respect is shown and students thrive and flourish in this exciting classroom. Contrast this classroom with the working classrooms Anyon (1980) describes.

Davies definition of success for students is this:

Knowing what they are learning and what it looks like gives students the information they need to assess themselves as they learn – to keep themselves on track. Learning to self-monitor in this way is an essential skill for independent, self-directed, lifelong learners. (p. 5)

In my experience in using Anne Davies techniques and strategies, students are empowered and engaged in their learning. They are eager and excited to talk about what they know. They share their new learning and are excited to continue learning.

The rationale for self-selecting the participants harkens back to the Spindlers' (Spindler & Spindler, 1988) study which gave evidence that the teacher's "perceptions of his own behavior were reinforced and given credence by the perceptions of others in his configuration of self-other relationships" (p. 14). Teachers and their supervisors such as principals, vice-principals and superintendents perceive the teacher as a good and caring educator. "It is clear, then, that we have a teacher who is very well thought of by the people who will judge him, promote him, and give him security within the profession and within the school system" (p. 6). I did not want to leave the selection up to principals, vice-principals and superintendents for this reason: they did not actually see what really happens in the classroom, and are often misguided and misled by their own biases and prejudices. As well, I will include myself in the research and interview process, because I believe I have valuable things to offer, having been successful for several years in engaging and empowering student learning and student self-confidence, as described above.

The selection process I used was an informal conversation. I talked with teachers about how the First Nation, Inuit, Métis, and students of colour are doing in their classrooms. I listened to hear key phrases which I believe are evidence of academic success for students.

The following are phrases I used as evidence of engaging and empowering teaching:

- "I have high expectations for all of my students." (evidence of believing that all students can learn)
- "I am always reflecting on how to make my lessons better so that all my students learn." (evidence of self-reflection and awareness that it is up to the teacher to find ways to help the students succeed)
- "I scaffold their learning so that all students are successful." (evidence of believing that all students can learn, if given the support they need)

- “I ask the students what they think they need in order to be successful.” (evidence of building a caring community in which students are a vital part of their own learning)
- “I have the students teach one another, and me...” (evidence of belief that the teacher isn't the fount of knowledge, but shares this responsibility with everyone in the class)
- “We often have discussions around hard topics such as poverty, prejudice, unfairness in the world, etc. I don't shy away from things because they are uncomfortable or controversial” [evidence that the teacher is working toward social justice and pushing the boundaries of White Dominant Culture, and also against Palmer's (2007) *Anatomy of Fear* in teachers]
- “I try to find books and articles to share which make us think about prejudice and unfairness in the world...” (evidence that the teacher is working toward social justice and pushing the boundaries of White Dominant Culture)
- “I ask the students to teach me about their culture and their history; I remind them that I don't know everything, and that we can learn together.” (evidence that the teacher validates the students as unique individuals, each with something to offer in the way of learning in their classroom)

Once I selected the five participants, and was approved by the Ethics Board, I conducted interviews with the participants who agreed to help with my research. I audiotaped the interviews and asked a series of questions. I piloted the interview ahead of time with a trusted colleague to make sure the questions were clear, and were the questions which would afford the richest information. I then transcribed the interviews and sent the transcripts to the participants so that they could make sure I had understood and quoted them correctly on each question. I offered to meet with the participants a second time to make changes, add to or clarify things from the interviews. I also offered to share the

results of my findings with the participants at a later date, and share the portraitures I created from the interviews. When contacted again, none of the participants asked for a second interview. All participants were satisfied with the transcripts and felt that they had shared their knowledge well during the first interview.

Interview Questions

1. What success are you having in teaching ALL students, including First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Ethnic students?
2. What teacher or classroom practices are you using which address this success? How often?
3. Explain if or how routine and persistence are important factors.
4. Explain if or how building a community of learners in your classroom is an important factor.
5. What stories can you share about success and/or engagement and empowerment you have witnessed for individual or groups of students?
6. How do books and discussions play a role in your classroom in regard to student success and/or engagement?
7. Knowing that an educator's goal is to successfully reach and successfully teach ALL students, what ideas and suggestions do you have that might help other teachers?

Data Analysis

I took all of the I interviews and read them looking for similarities and ideas and suggestions which would be useful in deconstructing White Dominant, Euro-Centric attitudes, beliefs and practices with other teachers and in classrooms. There are computer programs available that would have allowed me to track common themes and vocabulary within the transcripts but I am a more old-fashioned pen and paper person. I chose to work with paper and various coloured highlighters. I worked from the transcriptions, reading and highlighting the various themes I found running through the dialogues. I was excited to discover many commonalities and themes within the interviews. As already mentioned,

in keeping with portraiture writing, I constructed the findings in such a way as to be able to share it through this method of storytelling. I wrote stories – portraitures along the line of Sarah Lightfoot (1983) to share my results.

Lightfoot's research into the life and culture of three high schools involved visiting each school to try to get a feel for it and then to write about the experience, more from an aesthetic point of view than that of a researcher or an investigator: "After collecting descriptive data on the schools we were to create pieces that captured their lives, rhythms, and rituals. No other methodological boundaries or strategies were stipulated in advance of our visits" (p. 12). She was surprised to discover that she used some of the classic research techniques to capture her experience, such as "observation, interviewing, and ethnographic description" (p.13). She also found, however, that she had more freedom to try to recreate and share the atmosphere, culture and climate of the school using this method.

There is an obvious difference between what Lightfoot terms "pure" research and portraiture: In the former, the investigator behaves in a counter-intuitive manner, always the consummate skeptic. He or she tries not to let personal inclinations shape the inquiry. Portraiture, on the other hand permits these same inclinations to flourish, admits the shaping hand of the artist, and is less concerned with anticipated problems of replication. (p.15)

Lightfoot herself is later surprised at how portraiture has allowed her a perhaps more through and perceptive glimpse into the life of these schools, with themes, issues and challenges that were unspoken about coming to the forefront of her writing. She reveals "I have written more from the inside out" (p. 14).

My goal, as I approached my research, was to try to capture this same kind of experience. I endeavoured to interview the participants, taking down their responses and listening to their stories. I then attempted to recreate, with words, the philosophy from which each participant operates, and to

also create an image of the teacher-person inside, as well as producing an image of what their classroom culture and climate might be like.

Another reason for using portraiture, of course, is that I know *story* to be highly valued by the Indigenous peoples, especially in Canada, as a way of learning. I use story as a way of sharing my research in a way which is respectful and hopefully honouring to the Indigenous families I work with as well as the Indigenous educators from which I learn.

Haberman's Concept of 'Exemplary' Teaching

Haberman (2010) asks, "Is it possible to describe a teaching approach that can serve as an alternative to the pedagogy of poverty?" (p. 5). He goes on to list several criteria of what good teaching looks like in urban classrooms: students involved with explanations of human differences; students being taught major concepts, big ideas and general principles; students involved in the planning of their learning; students involved in such ideas as fairness, equity and/or justice in the world; students are active learners; students directly involved in real-life experiences; students involved in heterogeneous groups, both culturally and intellectually; students question widely accepted assumptions about the world; students involved in polishing and perfecting their work; students involved with technology and the access of information via internet; and students involved in reflecting on their own lives (Haberman, 2010, p.5). We will examine how the teachers of this study stand up to Haberman's idea of an exemplary teacher.

Validity, Trustworthiness, Reliability

There are limitations which may have affected the results. Limitations are other factors which could influence the results of this research. These are the other factors that might influence the

research: myself and my bias as the selector of the teachers who participated in this study; the teachers may have exaggerated or fabricated their actions and practices and/or the level of engagement or success they see in their classrooms. There is no consideration of the home life or level of parental involvement of the students in this study. A definition or concrete evidence of ‘success’ or ‘level of engagement’ or ‘empowerment’ of students has been addressed, with success being, not a number or letter grade as an evaluation, but using Davies’ (2007) research, achievement and success are based on how students view themselves and their own achievement.

Standards seem to assume that all students start in the same place, at the same time, and proceed to learn in the same way. Teachers know that learning is not sequential. Students learn in different ways and at different rates; there will never be a class where all students are the same...As diversity increases among our students, whether from learning styles, culture and language, family circumstances, or countless other factors, teachers need to learn how to allow for differences and to work toward students meeting standards. Then, diversity can be a source of strength in our communities and in our classrooms. (p. 34)

In these terms of success, engagement and empowerment, I believe listening to the participants talk about their classes and how they and/or their students assess will give me a good indication as to whether or not their students fall into these categories. Going back to Goodlad and Klein (1974):

We conclude that most of the schools visited were oriented to some generally accepted concept of what school is (a school is a school is a school) and not to an ongoing inquiry into either group or individual learning needs of specific children in particular communities (p.78)

Goodlad and Klein (1974) concluded that “the instructional environment of the classes we visited...were characterized by telling, teachers' questioning individual children in group settings, and an enormous amount of seemingly quite routine seatwork” (p.79). ‘Routine’ can be equated with

boring, uncreative, unimaginative, and brain-numbing. They go on to comment “Seatwork assignments were common to large numbers of children, the quick usually finishing and turning to other work, *the slow hardly ever completing the assignment*” (italics added for emphasis, p. 82). Children that were unmotivated by worksheets quickly became disengaged at this very young age, at a time when school should be fun and exciting and have many active and exciting learning opportunities to offer.

Equally crucial and telling, already, in these early and important years, by the design of the “educational teaching” method offered, that of worksheets, students are beginning to be being labeled, and selected for success by dint of the worksheet, which harkens back to Anyon’s (1980) version of education in a working class school. Schools push for rote memorization and menial tasks that do not give the students opportunities to think for themselves or allow them much opportunity to learn in groups. Goodlad and Klein (1974) did not find many learning groups within these classrooms: “Rarely did we find several such groups operating simultaneously with the teacher serving as a kind of consultant. *The teacher was the source, supervisor, and evaluator of almost all classroom activities*” (italics added for emphasis) (p. 85).

The classrooms mentioned in these previous studies show that students who constantly must stay in their desks, do menial and brain-numbing worksheets which are used more as a class management tool than for educational, learning purposes depict students who are unmotivated, unengaged and unsuccessful. By virtue of opposites, students who are involved in a classroom where the teacher facilitates the learning, and allows students to work in groups and have learning discussions, is a happy and engaged classroom where most students are motivated to learn. These students are successful in being engaged and motivated and this precipitates their learning, although, a limitation here may be that the teacher will over exaggerate her students' feelings and actions of engagement.

An added limitation may be that my bias may have appeared when consolidating and merging the data and information I collected. Knowing that this bias might occur is an important step in avoiding 'hearing what I want to hear' and 'seeing what I want to see' in the data collected. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) write about five validity criteria from Anderson and Herr, 1999 in their work. Of the five validity criteria to judge trustworthiness and reliability, the one on which this study may find challenges is the 'catalytic validity' issue. Catalytic validity “examines the degree to which the action research energizes the participants so that they are open to transforming their view of reality in relation to their practice, and highlights the emancipatory potential of practitioner research” (p. 611). I can only assume that the teachers will be honest and straightforward during the interview.

Again, this research is qualitative in nature and the researcher's hand and thoughts are very much apparent, constructed and manifest in this study, through participation in the study as well as in creating the portraits. Every study is biased, since it involves human beings who are biased by nature. Knowing this, I can proceed carefully, honestly and with integrity through the procedures and steps of this research. In reporting my findings within my thesis, as stated earlier, I will use portraiture to portray each teacher's classroom and students within the framework of the data and information which has been provided. I believe this is the best way to paint a picture of what classrooms in inner city and community schools can and should look like, and these are the ways teachers can go about making it happen within their own classrooms.

Ethical Considerations

In terms of ethics, this study has a low risk rate. (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2007) There will be no deception or hoaxing involved. In terms of risk-benefit ratio, “the balance between how much risk the participants will be exposed to and how much good is likely to result from the study” (p. 80). There is virtually no risk to the participants in the study, as they will be anonymous, and there is much to be

gained from examining what 'transformed' teachers are doing well in their classrooms. I am interested in what teachers, who have been successful in teaching all students, especially our Indigenous, Métis and Inuit students, are doing in their classrooms.

Research Plans

My plan, as the researcher, was to interview five teachers who have been self-selected. I interviewed them with the questions listed above, and then took the information gleaned and created portraits of the life and some inner thoughts of the educators. I also included myself in this process. I created six portraits which I hope reveal certain beliefs, practices and procedures these teachers employ which helps them in reaching and teaching their students.

Chapter Four

Six Portraits: Glimpses in the Lives of Enlightened Teachers

In this section I will introduce the participants. Their names have been replaced with pseudonyms, to protect their identity. Using some of their own words and phrases I will paint a picture of what each teacher thinks about and believes. Sometimes I will enter their classrooms as well to take a look at how these teachers interact with their students. As the portraits unfold, teacher beliefs, routines, practices and reflections will be revealed and glimpses will be shared as the participants work toward engagement, empowerment and academic success for all individuals in their classrooms, including the First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and New Canadian students.

Carmen Olinski

Carmen, a White teacher with 20 years teaching experience, much of it in community schools, teaches in a busy school in a thriving prairie city in Canada. It is one of the city's older schools – a red brick building with many windows looking out onto the street and into the playground. The school's population consists of First Nations and Métis as well as White students, and new Canadians from countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and China, to name a few.

Today, Carmen is teaching Social Studies to her grade three-four class. It is a group of lively students with diverse backgrounds, including First Nations, Métis, White, Asian and Pakistani students. She strives to engage students through inquiry and believes that planning well, thinking about the resources and scaffolding learning, helps motivate and excite students about learning. "I keep the bar high for all the students I work with," she says. "I've never felt like I've sacrificed anything because of student backgrounds. In fact, I think that my students of poverty and the students from different and diverse backgrounds will have broader learning because they have some richer background they can bring to our learning."

In Carmen's class, she has worked hard at building a community of learners. "Having that community where we're respectful" is important to Carmen. "I've had to actually teach that very explicitly and practice it with the students. We've called it 'Respectful Interactions in the classroom.' Having a safe and caring classroom is essential as well, and Carmen always asks herself, "Is it a safe place for us to share our learning?"

For Carmen, it is also about understanding the diverse cultures of her students. She works to honour the students and their cultures and takes "lots of opportunity for them to share personal stories because we have such a diverse ethnic group." In addition, she invites parents to come in as guest speakers whenever possible. One combination of mother, grandmother and student gave a presentation in Carmen's class. "And so, between the grandmother, the mother and the student – they did a wonderful presentation. All of the kids couldn't help but care because it personally affected all of us whether you had been there or not. They (the students) felt like they had experienced it."

Questioning and discussions are a key part of Carmen's instruction. She has had to teach her students how to interact in this manner, because she does not teach in the traditional manner of asking one question and having the students raise their hands to answer. Carmen pushes for authentic discussions and dialogue in her classes because she believes students learn best from one another. By authentic, Carmen means that it is never a one-sided conversation, that she encourages and expects students to participate and that the topics covered are important issues concerning everyone. "So, what does it look like?" Carmen thinks as she visualizes her classroom. "Well, it doesn't necessarily mean that everybody raises their hand, because to me, that often disrupts the flow of conversation. So, it's really challenging for students to understand. If they don't raise their hand, how do they go about participating? What does this community look like, where we're responding to each other's ideas and thinking, but in a respectful way?"

For Carmen, teaching is “about facilitating their learning in the community. It’s about having a safe place where students feel valued, and contributors. Asking questions has been part of that community. So I ask things like, ‘Who agrees? Who disagrees? Who has another idea?’” Carmen admits that this has been a challenge for her and the students, but she is persistent. “You have to push them a lot. And you do get push back because sometimes it’s hard for kids. But I will try to scaffold that. I’ll say, ‘Okay, take a few minutes and write about it.’ Or, I’ll say, ‘Okay, take a few minutes and talk to your neighbor about it. Build your ideas.’ I don’t always just throw it right out there so that the students feel threatened.”

Carmen knows that when she and the students take the time to write down or share their ideas before having a general class discussion, they have much more to share. The students feel like they can contribute. In this way, Carmen makes the classroom a safe place where everyone feels confident that they have something worthwhile to say, and where everyone will listen to and respect everyone else.

In speaking of persistence, Carmen admits that it has taken her many months to develop a sense of community with the students, and that persistence is both about her and the students. “I think I need to have a lot of persistence and I need to have some routines in place for myself and for the students. I think that persistence, especially, is important for all the learners in the classroom, and that’s myself included. So, we don’t give up. We have to have a sense that we’re always learning.”

It has been a challenge for Carmen to teach in this manner, and the students have not always been compliant or engaged. She also knows that, across the hall, teachers are using much more traditional methods to deliver instruction. In neighbouring classrooms, the students sit in their desks more – do seatwork, and do not participate in learning groups and class discussions as much. That is not the way Carmen wants to teach. It has meant a lot of practicing of routines and procedures to get the students to where they are now. “And for me,” she says, “I had to be persistent through the

challenges and not give in. Otherwise, it would have been easy to just bring out the worksheets, but that's not the way I want to teach." Carmen has been persistent because she believes there is a more authentic way to teach, which can engage and motivate students to learn.

Carmen works hard to make the learning authentic for her students. By this she means that she carefully chooses and plans learning activities that are not merely filling in blanks in a workbook. The activities might include reading several different sources for information and comparing them for biases, including websites. "Thinking about your students' interests is very important," she says. "And one thing I take pride in is engagement. Engagement comes from authenticity in the sense that students feel personally empowered in something meaningful; it's not just something shallow." She adds, "You have to know your students: What will motivate them? What will engage them? You have to be creative with engagement."

When pressed further, Carmen explains that you have to actively look for ways that will engage your students by first knowing what their interests are, by knowing about their backgrounds, and by honouring their backgrounds. "I think those are two important, key pieces of the puzzle. They really support student learning – starting from where they are at, understanding your learners and their background knowledge, and building from there."

Carmen also finds that engagement helps her a lot with classroom management. "It might look easy because when I'm working with the students, and the kids are hopefully, doing all the work, the engagement is always high so I'm not spending all my time managing." She knows that when the students are actively learning and excited about what they are learning, for the most part, they stay focused on their tasks and do their work. They work collaboratively in groups, share their learning, support and help each other to learn and function as a learning community. "We're all just working together, we're just thinking hard and I have a smaller role than just standing up at the front and

delivering a lecture. I'm just guiding the students, and they're generating the ideas and the thinking. I'm just asking the questions." So, Carmen often works as a facilitator in her classroom, guiding with questions, and supporting the individuals who need extra help.

Engagement, she also finds, brings an added benefit to her room. "I find, with engagement, if they're engaged, they're more likely to be there. Engagement leads to better attendance." So, Carmen works hard to find ways to engage her students, which in turn, motivates them to learn.

Sometimes that authentic learning can be challenging, but this kind of teaching and learning is important for Carmen. "It's all about scaffolding and that gradual release of responsibility," she says. "I always model. I begin with the modelling, then we guide some learning together, and then the students can work independently. Another thing that I've really learned over the last year or two, especially, is a strategy that I use all the time. It is doing the small tasks versus trying to always work on the big tasks. So, for me, it's about how do I scaffold this into small chunks of learning versus throwing out a huge amount of learning at once. I call these mini-challenges. I try, always, to look at what the different mini-challenges are that will help my students to grasp the big idea."

Carmen is always thinking about how to help her students be successful with their learning. Whether they are working individually, in pairs or in small groups, she is continually assessing, through observations and conversations with her students, trying to see who needs help and what kind of help they need. She looks for ways to scaffold their learning, often just helping one or two, but sometimes having to call the whole class back together for a few minutes to re-teach or clarify some confusion. She is always working to support her students' learning, and to help them work toward independent learning.

In talking about her planning and teaching, Carmen says, "You gather all that thinking (and on-going assessment of students) together. And you know that it's not going to be lesson-one-lesson-

two-lesson-three. You follow the lead of your students, and at the same time it helps you to think about what are the different learning pieces that need to be scaffolded. Be creative,” Carmen adds. When talking about planning units she says, “Don’t solely rely on what other people have said or done, or a unit on the internet. It helps if you know your students.” You need to know their strengths, their weaknesses, their interests and their backgrounds. Carmen believes that this is what leads to authentic teaching and engagement of students: “It’s a mix of well-designed challenges, well-scaffolded learning, and I also think, you have to be creative.”

It’s also important for Carmen to get feedback from her students, even at their young age. “A couple of times a year, or often at the end of a unit, I’ll ask, ‘Tell me, how do you think I did? You know, my outcomes for you this time were this and this and this...’ And the students respond well to this. “I’m not afraid to ask the students,” Carmen says, because she is always reflecting on her lessons and the learning experiences she chooses for her students. “I always have the kids rate me, and they’re usually pretty honest.” Carmen finds that she can learn from the comments her students make about her teaching, and the experiences she chooses for them.

After months of teaching this way, Carmen says, “They’re getting used to it. At the end of the day I’ve had students say to me, ‘Do you know what? It was really hard.’ And the kids can actually speak to me about it, and I’ll agree, it was really hard. But, they love the work that they do now, and they’re proud of the learning they’ve accomplished. They’ve actually learned to love the way I teach.” And it’s very exciting for Carmen, too. “I would say rewarding – it’s rewarding because I know, at the end of the day, I know that the students have learned a ton.”

Brooke Haadt

Brooke, a White teacher, has been teaching for 15 years, most of it in community schools. She is passionate about teaching and equally passionate about making sure that every student and parent

feels welcome and accepted in school. Brooke works in another old brick school nearby, which is shaped like a castle. It is one of the community schools in the city and she teaches grade two/three. Brooke loves her job and loves working with the students and parents in this neighbourhood. Recesses almost always find her outside walking and talking to the students.

Brooke feels that the most important thing in student success is building relationships with the students. She works hard to build good, honest relationships with her students and their parents. “No matter what ages of kids I taught, they knew I cared about them and I was truly interested in them and their families. I think showing them that I cared about them, and I believed in them and I knew they could do anything, was something I tried to convey every day.”

Getting to know her students and their families is key for Brooke, but it’s more than that, it’s about love and acceptance as well. “Get to know all of your kids and learn to love things about them. Because if you don’t like or love your students, they know it. And if you don’t think they can do well, they know it. And that is your job as a teacher. You HAVE to get to know all your kids, and with that, you need to know where they come from.”

Building a community of learners is also something Brooke works hard to achieve. “It goes back to believing in every child,” she says, “telling them they can do it – building their confidence. I think that if you wanted to take a group of kids, and you wanted to have this dream team of kids that could do anything – I think, any dream team, you start by getting to know each other, building relationships, knowing that I’m there for you, no matter what. It’s about talking about things - accepting.”

Brooke also knows that being accepting means accepting all students in the classroom. “You know, we have lots of assumptions we make of people, and I think that because they all come together and they sit in our neat and tidy rows in our clean school, we feel like they should kind of all be the

same.” Brooke reminds us that we sometimes forget, “they all come from different homes and are different people who have different values and habits and different ideals, and different ways of measuring success.”

It’s important in Brooke’s classroom to celebrate the diversity of her students and their families. “Really celebrating diversity is key, so that you do not have any issues where somebody ever snubs anybody else for being male or female, or being any richer or poorer, or one race, or celebrating something, or smelling like curry, or whatever it is.” Brooke works hard to build that community of learners in her room because she knows it makes a difference. “So, if you can establish that in your classroom at the beginning of the year, you’re on your way. And you can move mountains with the kids just because each and every single one of them knows you believe in them, and that you’re counting on them, and that you have expectations of them.” Brooke believes that by establishing relationships, creating an accepting classroom and believing in her students, they will trust her and themselves enough to strive to succeed, but Brooke also feels routine is an important factor as well.

Brooke works hard to establish routines and procedures in her room at the beginning of the year, but believes that these need to be co-constructed with the students. “We’re a little family at school,” she says. “I don’t ever walk in with rules and regulations. We make them together and we talk – dialogue is huge in our class. If there was ever an issue in class, we talked about things. Solving problems, we did together. And it was never anybody’s problem to fix on their own, whether it was a problem on the playground or a problem with school. I never had regimented do’s and don’t’s.” By talking openly about the issues that occur, Brooke finds that they tend to disappear, and the solutions to them come from the discussions and her students.

Brooke feels that the routines, established and practiced in class, help make a safe and caring climate in her classroom, and that’s important to her and the students. “If your students know that

your classroom is a safe place for everybody, and that you will not just turn your ear to snide comments, and that nobody is allowed to ever speak down to anybody in that class – ever. Then they're all safe, and they'll take risks for you. They will try something new; they will write more sentences, or be willing to share out loud, a little bit, even if they're afraid. But you know what, they won't take risks for the teacher who doesn't do that. They won't try."

Looking beyond the problems to the underlying issues is also part of Brooke's relationship with her students. "There was always a reason why somebody didn't get something handed in. There's always a reason why they don't do those things, right? I don't believe that there are bad kids who don't care about contributing."

Brooke goes on to explain something she read and believes in from researcher Alfie Kohn. "There are ABC's of things kids want, and one is autonomy. The others are belonging and competence. Kids want to be good at something. Kids want to belong and they want to have a sense of competence. And the autonomy is that they want to have choices. They want to believe that they play a role in decisions made about themselves."

In Brooke's class, she actively works toward the ABC's of engagement by planning and delivering instruction which helps students reach these things. The way she delivered the spelling units for her grade two-three students is one example. "It was a lot of work," she admits, "but they all had different spelling lists, according to where they were." It was challenging and yet motivating for Brooke since the students kept improving and moving up through the lists. This was a new way for Brooke to teach and she says, "I didn't know how it would go." She thought about how to make it successful for her students, and she wondered if they would pay attention and be upset by the fact that some students might have, "twenty words on the list and they're hard words, as opposed to the child who was still on yellow or green and there was only eight words on it." Brooke came up with the idea

of using spelling buddies, but she wondered what that would look like. She reflected on how to make this a successful venture for her students. “We talked about encouragement. We talked about words to use if somebody didn’t do as well (on their test) and was disappointed. How could you support your spelling buddy?”

Brooke discovered that the students really did not think about where anyone else was at, and respected each person. “They were so excited about doing better for themselves each week that it didn’t really matter.” She found that pre-teaching the students the encouraging and supporting words helped the students to be empathetic and understanding. As Brooke reflects on her teaching she says, “So, I guess, some of my practices, across the board, have been about success, but the students kind of come at their own pace, but they need to be challenged, too.”

She also believes and works at celebrating success. “How many times do you just celebrate, celebrate, celebrate,” she asks, “and sometimes put the deficits off for a little while? In teaching, I think we’re programmed to always make the students better by pointing out their faults instead of celebrating all of the great things about them, and realizing the other things will come. And I don’t know if that’s something we’re taught to do, or something we think we’re supposed to do. But I don’t know if we celebrate enough.”

Celebrating success also means knowing her students well enough to offer them different ways of sharing their learning. “They’ll come at their own pace,” Brooke says. “They have to be challenged a little bit about how they’re going to show what they know. How are they going to share the information they’ve learned? So, you have to be creative. You have to find many different ways to help the students share their new knowledge. You have to find some way, creatively, for kids to show what they know.”

Journaling is an important teaching tool Brooke uses every year with her students. “I learn so much about the kids, and the things they opened up and talked about,” Brooke comments, indicating that this is one way to really get to know her students. “And it doesn’t matter if they write three sentences or three paragraphs, I always write a comment and read through and add things to the side.” It was a way for Brooke to communicate on a personal and private level with her students.

Brooke was not sure if the students really appreciated journaling until something happened. “I handed back the journals and had forgotten to write in one.” The student showed Brooke his journal. “And I didn’t think he would give a care about his journal. It surprised me when he said, ‘You didn’t finish writing in my journal.’ I said, ‘What! Oh gosh, I’m sorry.’ And I asked for it back to think about and make a comment in it later. “I couldn’t believe it mattered to him.” Because of this experience and a few others, Brooke always incorporates journaling into the classes she teaches.

Teaching in this manner and having strong bonds with her students, and celebrating their diversity and successes has been very impactful and successful for Brooke. “I’ve had AHA moments that kids are amazing,” she says. “And I’ve seen kids reach out and help other kids and that’s humanity. But when somebody’s kind to somebody else without anybody asking them, that’s important. I just think we’re teaching kids how to be good people. You know, you can have the highest grades – you can have 100s in everything by the time you graduate grade twelve, but if you don’t know how to help another human being, I don’t think it’s any good at all.”

Curtis-Dean Pride

Curtis-Dean (White) has been teaching for 12 years in community schools and now in an alternative program. He teaches in a flat-roofed school and enjoys the opportunity to get out into the community and area with his students as much as possible. Planning his instruction around authentic learning, he is passionate about using the inquiry approach in his teaching, and making things relevant

for his students. Curtis-Dean spends a lot of time planning for the optimal engagement and learning of his students.

At the beginning of the year, in his grade eight class, he gets to know his students and establishes procedures and routines. He believes that it is important for academic success, for safety and for respectful interactions. “Right off the bat in the fall, there’s a lot of routine established, and just some baseline things that the students need to expect from me and I need to expect from them, so that no matter where we are or what we’re doing, people are going to be safe, and people are going to be able to learn in a way that is not going to be harmful to them in any way.”

Curtis-Dean believes that this establishes the atmosphere and class climate for the year. “I think that really sets the tone for our class.” He adds that the safety routines and understanding in class is very important. “We just make sure that we set a level of understanding with each other of how we need to make a class like we have, work. Just in the fact that the students have a lot of freedom, but that freedom is also bound by some definite routines.” By freedom, Curtis-Dean explains that he gives his students a lot of choice in the learning experiences he provides and in how they will show and share their learning with the class. He works to create a democracy in his classroom.

It is also important for Curtis-Dean to build a community of learners in his classroom, and he almost always starts each year with a Social Studies unit which is about Canadian Immigration and lends itself well to students getting to know one another and their backgrounds, through their family stories. “The students will either create a story or base a story on something from their own history, whether it’s their parents or grandparents. Or they’ll research and create a story of some fictional family that came to Canada, why they came and where they came to.”

The First Nation and Métis students also share their stories. Curtis-Dean comments, “Often those can be the most interesting in terms of, there isn’t that sort of typical immigration path here.

They have some interesting stories passed down and they dig a little deeper into their family history and share what makes Canada besides the people that came to Canada, and that's the people who were here in the beginning."

In terms of teaching about respect, Curtis-Dean admits that, "it takes some work." He adds that "you can still work at that level of respect and make sure that differences are celebrated and different strengths are brought out through making sure you give students a variety of ways of shining." By this he means that he offers his students a variety of ways to share their learning. He helps them pick areas where they have a talent or "they can go to something they feel strongly is something they're good at."

At first, at the beginning of the year, his students are often stuck in the more traditional ways of sharing learning, such as reports and essays. "I think, when they hear the word 'story', initially they think, okay we're writing a story. Their questions are things like: how many pages is the story? Or, do I double-space the story? And they've been sort of locked into that idea of a story. But then we sort of broaden it to mean telling your story, and that story can be done in a whole variety of ways. It can be told visually. It can be done orally, or written. The idea of authentic learning is bounced around lots, in our classroom." The students are also involved in the assessment process. "We come up with of how they can tell their story – a sort of point system of how they and I will be able to evaluate their story."

Curtis-Dean also finds that giving the students lots of choice about assignments, how to do assignments and how to evaluate assignments is key to engagement, along with inquiry, and hooking it to authentic learning in the real world. "The power and engagement comes from them creating the questions, working with an expert in that field, and then showing off their results to an audience." He works hard to connect his students to the larger community, to experts and professionals in specialized

fields of study, and to find ways for students to share and celebrate their learning in authentic and meaningful ways. In one such activity, Curtis-Dean had biology students from the university work with his students to create presentations on various animal life along the river. The goal was to highlight the fragile lifecycles of animals in relation to water pollution and human encroachment on the environment. Another time, Curtis-Dean's class worked with architects and civic planners to create ideas of what a future city would look like.

One important key to engagement for Curtis-Dean is "looking at the purpose of anything that the students are doing and making sure that I, first, have a clear sense of what is the purpose of whatever the students are working on." The next important key is "making sure that that discussion is had between me and the students and that they know the purpose of what they're doing." Curtis-Dean believes that the students need to understand the purpose behind every assignment and be able to articulate why they're doing something. He also believes that the students should be allowed a choice in how to complete the assignment.

Always looking for exciting teach-able moments, Curtis-Dean is always open to new ideas and suggestions to ensure his students get quality, authentic learning. His class had been reading a novel about a disaster that happened on Mount Everest and he invited a couple of climbers to come in to make a presentation. "The climbers came up with the idea of us not just taking the single side of the story, in terms of the novel we were studying." The climbers told Curtis-Dean that there were a number of other books and articles written about the same incident, offering many different perspectives. He managed to track down several of these and soon had his class divided into groups, with each group reading a different perspective on the disaster. "It made all of us look critically at that story," Curtis-Deans says, but it had a far greater effect as well. "I think the students really found out, in fact, that there are other people's perspectives on an issue." It was a unit Curtis-Dean is very

proud of and he was happy with the amount of discussion that took place in class. “This really lent itself to the students having some really great class dialogue, discussion and debate about the issues.”

Curtis-Dean likes to run his class like a democracy, where no one person, himself included, has all the power. He believes that one way students become engaged and motivated is by making choices for and about themselves, their learning activities and their learning outcomes, to some extent. “I think listening to what they would like to contribute, and as long as you can find a way to reach those objectives, and do it in a creative way, so that the students have some say in how you reach that end goal. If you’re able to think outside the box a little bit, I think that’s something that goes a long way with the students really buying into the classroom atmosphere.”

Sheila Russell

Sheila (White) is a passionate and competent teacher. She has eight years’ experience, much of it in schools like the community school she presently works at. She is well-grounded in literacy strategies, in grouping students according to achievement and in on-going assessment to change the groups, even daily, in order to maximize strong instruction. Sheila Russell teaches grade one in a busy community school in a large Canadian prairie city. It is situated in a core neighbourhood which is home to many First Nations and Métis families living in poverty as well as New Canadians who have just arrived in Canada, many not speaking English.

It is the beginning of a new year and she stands at the classroom door greeting her students as most arrive with their mothers, or grandmothers. The school has had a pancake breakfast this morning, which encourages the parents to come to school with their children. This is a popular event and the hallways are overflowing with parents, students and teachers. Sheila tries to greet each child and parent as they come to her door. She makes a point of smiling at them.

When everyone is in the room, Sheila begins by thanking them for trusting her to teach their children. She hands out the forms that will need to be filled out, and tells the parents she would be happy to help them with it any day after school. She tells parents that she really wants to get to know her students and the families, and asks them to sign up for a time to meet with her. She shares some of the things she would like to find out about each child: What are his/her favourite things to do? When does he/she feel frightened? What makes him/her angry? What does he/she love to do? These things, she says, will help her to teach the children in the most meaningful way. Sheila offers to meet parents at the school, or come to their homes if they would like – the choice is theirs to make.

In the next few days, Sheila sets out to teach the routines of the school day. She models again and again and then has the students practice. She can see that it is going to take quite a while to get the routines down with this particular group of students, but she isn't worried. She knows that with persistence of instruction and practice on her part, it will happen. She also begins to assess the students, to find out their most immediate learning needs. In this grade one room, the students run the gamut from reading at a grade two level to not knowing their alphabet and sounds of the letters. Sheila knows though, that by using ability-based groupings, she will maximize her instructional time.

Over the next few months, Sheila's persistence at modeling and practicing routines and procedures pays off, as does building a community of learners in her classroom. "Building a community of learners, I feel, is the most important thing to do within your classroom because without understanding the individuals, their family stories, their backgrounds – all of those situations – you don't know how to best support the students and maximize their learning opportunities," she says. "And so, this year I've really worked hard at trying to develop an even better community of learners by trying to get my parents more engaged at school and at home with their children."

When Sheila speaks of her students and their achievements, it is with pride. “A major thing in my room has been developing the confidence of the children and creating a classroom environment to support them and encourage them to take risks. So even when they’re reading, and volunteers come to listen to our student read, they comment that my children – even the ones that don’t know – have a go at the words and make attempts.” She knows that children will not take risks if they don’t feel safe, and they won’t risk sharing with one another, either. “Other successes have been having the students working with one another to self-assess, to peer assess and to work together in collaborative groups on tasks.”

Within a few months, the classroom routines and procedures are pretty much in place, although Sheila always has students moving in and out of her classroom, transferring to other schools or leaving the city. But with the majority of students following the procedures and practices, Sheila and others can immediately see the effect it has on learning and engagement in the classroom. “When the principal and vice-principal came into my room to watch my class, they said, one of the things that they’re so happy to see is the independence of these children. And so, it doesn’t matter what ability level they’re at, they’re all doing their tasks, and they know what they need to do. I don’t need to assist at all, and that’s because the kids know their routine, but it’s also having the tasks that are at their level.”

The tasks Sheila has her students involved in are authentic reading and writing tasks. “I do all my explicit instruction, teaching them all the skills, and modelling them together as a class, and then the students go into those small groups. So then, they’re doing more purposeful tasks. And the purposeful tasks are often based on where they’re at and what they’re needing. So I use a lot of evidence-based assessment to support what I’m doing in my room and to inform my instruction.”

Sheila goes on to mention that she is constantly making notes on each student, writing anecdotal

records, and making observations as her students work, either in small groups or with her. “I’m making observations, looking at what they can do, writing down what to help them with next.” The groups in Sheila’s room are constantly changing as the students learn, as compared to the old-fashioned reading group version where once a robin or bluebird, always a robin or bluebird, trapped for life with a label. In Sheila’s case, evidence-based groupings help Sheila to specifically target the learning needs of her students so that they learn and move on. She spends a lot of time thinking strategically about what each student needs in order to succeed.

This works well in Sheila’s room for the reason that she targets learning needs, models new learning and scaffolds students until learning takes place. She understands that the learning groups change constantly in her classroom, unlike the more traditional streaming groups which trap and label children. She smiles as she talks about the success her students are having. “Six of my students are now beyond where they need to be at the end of grade one, and when they came, none of them knew their alphabet; none of them could write, and they couldn’t read. And now, all of them have gone beyond where they need to be.” Sheila chalks this up to the ability-based groupings, the on-going assessment to continually change the groups, the teaching students where they are at, and the time spent doing purposeful tasks, which are authentic reading and writing tasks. She also knows that the way she works with students and their families and the way she provides instruction have helped make that success happen.

Sheila believes that you need to base your instruction on questions like, “What did they do today? What do they need next? Where did they have trouble?” These questions help her reflect on her students’ success and make plans for how and what she will teach tomorrow. Otherwise, she says, “it’s just like blanket instruction and you’re not looking at the needs of all the students.” Sheila is very good at looking at her students’ needs, engaging them by understanding their needs and their

backgrounds and then allowing them to work at their own pace and levels in order to learn and grow, academically.

Curtis Taylor

Curtis Taylor (White) has been teaching for fifteen years, much of it in a community school setting, all of it in high school. He specializes in Science, although lately he has been teaching Math. He is a very reflective person and thinks a lot about how he can reach and teach all of his students. He is passionate about their success and is always looking for creative ways to engage and motivate his young charges. It is important to him that he always does his best, each and every day, at school and in his classes. He also understands that his Grade 9 Math students are still developing, and make mistakes, and say things they don't mean, especially in this sprawling high school, which is designated as a community school. In this particular class, Curtis has the opportunity to co-teach.

Curtis understands the value of life-long learning. He is grateful to his school system for providing new, strong professional development and support over the past few years. He admits that he shied away from issues regarding his First Nations and Métis students because he felt he didn't have, "the competence to know how to teach or address issues. I didn't want to offend," he admits. "I didn't want to be token – I didn't want to do that." With all of the professional development and support, Curtis feels he has learned a lot and feels better about being able to relate to his students. "Not that I'm perfect at this," he adds, "but now it's part of my curriculum planning, too, whereas it wasn't before. I was offending people and not even knowing it, and now I bring in other cultures – not only First Nations, Métis and Inuit but other cultures as well."

It is also important for Curtis to build relationships with his students, in class but also within the wider circle of the school as well. "We had a multicultural club at our school which gave a name and a face and identities and we started to get to know students in a way which wasn't just students in

a desk,” he says. It helped students feel seen and validated for who they were, and everyone began to learn a little bit about other people and cultures. It began to help everyone see that they had many similarities and many things in common.

It is important for him to meet the students where they’re at and get to know them. “We started in a different way,” he says. “We stood at the door and we said, ‘Hi,’ to everybody that came through. We wanted to say hello to everybody. And we got sort of a barometer – a reading of what and how the kids were doing that day.”

It was a Math class, “designed to address gaps in Math learning,” Curtis explains. “But the underlying theme that myself and this other teacher would address would be actually giving students’ motivation and confidence. And what I found – because we both had teaching experience and probably had an open philosophy encompassing all students, is that by the time the second semester rolled around, they started trusting us in a different sort of way, because they had consistency. They trusted what we said, and I think, we also listened.”

Because of their open philosophy to teaching, Curtis says, “We used an approach where a lesson plan was malleable on that day.” This means that no lesson was ever set in stone. Lessons changed daily, according to the needs of the students, and sometimes the lessons got pretty creative. Curtis recalls how one day, the students were not getting a particular math concept. “So we decided, out of the blue, to bring in chips. It was all about sorting and patterns and just showing that so many things have patterns, and if you look for patterns, this will help in Math.”

“So, one of us got a bag of chips. It was a mixed bag and there were pretzels, cheerios and all sorts of different things. We gave the students each a handful and got them to sort them. Of course, they could sort them quite easily.” Curtis and his partner then held a class discussion around sorting

and looking for patterns in things. “Well, why don’t you look at your Math in that same perspective?” Curtis asked the students.

“And you could see the lights go on. The fact that they were eating the chips at the same time helped in this whole process. But I think they started to see that we were going to take them at whatever stage they were at rather than forcing them to be where they weren’t,” he says of his students.

Many of the lesson plans were malleable and Curtis and his teaching partner tried hard to make things hands-on and relevant to the students, which Curtis adds is more difficult in high school. He shares experiences of having his students working in groups in the hallways. “I honestly think this was one of the first times they were allowed to go outside of the classroom. I know that some teachers probably weren’t as comfortable taking them out because of their behaviours, or maybe the noise. But it was enough into the semester that I think we had enough trust.” He comments on how he and his partner laid out the ground rules and expectations for behaviour. “We had a five minute conversation: This is how you behave in the hallway, and there were no problems.” Not only were the students on-task and engaged, they enjoyed the hands-on activities. This, in turn, helped them understand Math problem-solving, and made them see that Math could be enjoyable, too. Curtis was impressed that many of the students stayed behind at the end to help them clean up the hallway.

Routine and persistence are also important factors for Curtis. “I think that’s almost the essence of how I teach, philosophically,” he comments. “The students want to know what’s going to happen. They want to have things that are predictable, so that they can feel more and more comfortable. And I had to get their trust by being predictable, by being consistent, by not stepping on toes – in order for that trust to happen.” Staying persistent is also key, even when the students continue to push against the rules. “So from September-October-November – there were some rough

months when they would try us – it would be no different than a teenager trying to figure out where their boundaries are. But once we established that trust, they were loyal. But you see, the persistence and routine – day in and day out – they actually start to trust you. If you’re routine-persistent and allow people to come in at their own speed – that is so imperative to teaching and learning.”

The persistence and routines help establish that community of learners in the classroom for Curtis. “When you build a community of learners, you’re building independence, you’re building independence so that the students are not dependent upon you as a teacher.” Curtis knows that persistence in routines and procedures leads to establishing a learning community and will eventually pay dividends in student learning. “Once they decide they’re part of the community, they want to engage in it. It’s surprising how their level of engagement will come up.” When the level of engagement goes up, student achievement also rises.

In building and living within that community of learners, Curtis also believes that it’s important to show students that the teacher is not the keeper and imparter of all the knowledge. “So I think, if you want to build a community of learners you have to bring in different facets. You’re not the only one that can portray this knowledge. It’s a good idea to try to show different perspectives that may be saying the same thing. Hopefully, then the students begin to realize that, in this community, there’s a base of knowledge that other people will share, even though we may have slightly different ways to go about it or slightly different training.”

Curtis’ philosophy on teaching is that “it should be as a facilitator. And there are certain times where you have to be like a coach. A coach should never be the focal part of a team. But sometimes, in practice, they have to be because of certain learning. But the ultimate goal should be as a facilitator to the ultimate gateway of knowledge for students.”

Curtis is very reflective about his teaching practice. His goal and aim in the classroom is to help all of his students engage and be successful and he does what he can to motivate them and make it happen for them. He thinks and plans creatively, trying to make his lessons relevant for his students. He also works hard to get to know his students, and he listens to them.

Curtis recalls one story – an incident that changed his life as a teacher. Talking about a student in his class, Curtis says, “It wasn’t a month into this class when - right at the beginning of the class – a student says, ‘Why don’t you care about us?’ And I still remember this, and I was shocked. You know, I was thinking, we’re already a month into this and can’t you tell I care about you? Because I really do. The student could probably see that my face was confused and he says, ‘I’m not talking about your teaching, like, you’re always prepared and you’re on time. But when do you ever ask us about our soccer games? Or maybe we had something exciting happen. And – sometimes there’s reasons why we’re not learning on that day-’”

Curtis continues with his story, “I still remember back, that my initial reaction was to be quiet and not say anything in front of the class. What he was saying could have been deemed disrespectful, but at that point, I just realized there’s something more to this and I allowed it to go on. It became obvious that he wanted me to be more aware of what was happening outside the class, rather than just going right into the instruction and doing all the things – A-B-C – that I was taught to do at university.” Curtis smiles and shakes his head. After that, something happened in the class that day, and it changed the class for the rest of the semester. “It was amazing how the students opened up and shared. And after that I made sure that I had a pulse – and I can’t know everything about everybody – but, if you listen, and if you look at the writing, you’ll start to get a feel for who they are. And, they’re also reflecting to you constantly. You just have to see the signs.”

Samantha Gordon

Samantha (White) has been teaching for 23 years, about ten years of it in community schools in the middle years, grades six to eight. She has spent the last ten years working with many First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Ethnic middle years students in an intensive class for students who struggle with reading and writing. Many of the students come into her classroom already disengaged, unmotivated and convinced they are failures at school. Sam has worked hard to find ways to engage and motivate the students, and has done much reading, research in this area, as well as leading and attending professional development sessions which try to address this issue. Sam is passionate about helping these students become motivated and confident learners.

In Sam's class, she works first to get to know her students and build relationships with them. "Building a community of learners is essential to student success in class," she says. "Students need to feel welcome, to feel accepted and to feel that they can take risks. I begin to build our community of learners on the first day by co-constructing criteria around what good learning looks like in our classroom. The students come up with the criteria for this and it becomes the ways things are done in our classroom. Everyone is part of this, and everyone – eventually, buys into it. This isn't always quick and easily. Respect is a big part of building the learning community, and with so many ethnic students in the class, acceptance is huge as well. Everyone needs to feel safe in the classroom, and needs to be able to work with anyone in the class."

Persistence also fits into building a community of learners. "I think routine and persistence are very important," Sam says. "At the beginning of the year, we practice that routine until the students become good at it and know it well. Some of our routines include how to work in small groups, how to give and get good feedback, how to use the computer, how to pick a book and how to sustain silent reading. These are some of the things we practice. Persistence is not just important for the students,

but for me as well. I need to stay persistent and keep working on the routines and procedures, even if it takes months, because I have a goal in mind and I know that once the students feel comfortable in the classroom, they begin to try. And once they begin to try, they begin to succeed. And once they begin to succeed, they begin to believe in themselves. So, we all stay persistent until we learn – or master a job or task. It sure makes working in the classroom a lot easier for the students, and more productive and enjoyable for them, too.”

Sam believes that building that community of learners and being persistent leads to student engagement. “It begins to empower the students to take control of their own behaviour and learning, and helps them become independent.” She also speaks about expectations. “I always keep the bar high for my students. If I aim high, I know, some will be able to reach – or almost reach – where I aimed. Others will not get quite so high, but they will grow, and I find ways to help scaffold their learning. Sometimes, for some students I have to break things into mini-steps for them – but it’s all with the idea that once they know the mini-steps, they can use them and work towards independence.”

When assigning tasks, Sam believes in modelling, scaffolding and providing choice. “I give strong rationale for why learning something is important. I also connect it to their lives – make it relevant for them. I engage the students by using relevant, real life examples and making their assignments relevant and real life, too. I also try to give them as much choice as possible. And I often use inquiry, as a way to engage students, through the questions they ask.”

Sam also believes it’s important for teachers to be excited learners themselves. “I would say, be happy and excited about learning yourself. Model that and your students will be excited, too. Model being excited when you find an interesting fact in a book and pretty soon your students will be wanting to share interesting tidbits they’ve found as well. Make learning fun in your class! Think outside the box and find ways which will engage and excite your students.”

In getting to know her students, Sam wants to find out about them and their families. At the beginning of the year, she often asks her students to share an important holiday or celebration from their culture. She lets the students choose the event and also lets them decide how to share it. Because she has a mix of First Nations, Métis, Inuit and New Canadian students in her class, she knows that there will be a lot to share.

In speaking of the first time she had done this with her middle years students, Sam says, “I knew I had stumbled upon the right thing to do to bring this particular group together. I saw how animated and excited they got when I told them they could present their holiday or celebration in any way they chose. It was amazing how much learning went on!” But, Sam realized there were far more important effects from this assignment. “After all of the students had shared their special day, things began to change in the class. The students mixed more readily. I think it was partly because they found out they had a lot in common. They began to draw together as a cohesive group.”

The biggest thing for Sam, though, is to keep looking for ways to engage her students, to keep scaffolding their learning and modeling for them until they begin to see small successes in their learning. “Once the students taste a bit of success, they are on their way,” Sam says. “Once they begin to see that they can learn, they become more confident. They begin to see themselves as readers and writers and many of the students begin to soar.

When that happens,” Sam says, “I believe it is my job to basically stay out of their way and let them learn! They only need me to jump in now and then to teach them one small thing and off they go again, learning independently! It’s like; I’m watching from the sidelines, assessing their needs and keeping my eye on them. Sometimes I work with them individually; sometimes I pull a small group together because they need the same thing. Other times, I model for the whole class. But my biggest concern is that, if I try to stay in control of them too much – if I try to tell them what they have to learn

or how they have to learn it, I will get in the way of their learning. I have to remember, with true engagement and true learning, the sky truly is the limit. They know the objectives because we talk about them, and I always make sure they reach them. But most times, if I'm teaching like this, the students surpass the objectives and are very excited and motivated to keep on learning!"

Sam also believes, "It's not about me as the teacher. It's all about the students. It's all about empowering them, helping them be successful, giving them some confidence, and then watching them continue to grow and learn independently."

Chapter Summary

We have just glimpsed into the classroom practices of six exemplary teachers who have worked hard and continue to work at disrupting dominant thinking and offering excellent teaching and learning experiences for their students. They share many of the qualities and use many of the practices Haberman (2010) deems as, "exemplary. Unlike the directive teacher acts that constitute the pedagogy of poverty, however, these tend to be indirect activities that frequently involve the creation of a learning environment" (p. 5).

All six teachers talked of honouring students' backgrounds and meeting students where they were at in order to build relationships and trust with their students. I believe this demonstrates great respect for the individual student. All of the teachers mentioned building a community of learners in their classrooms, and creating safe and caring environments so that students would feel safe and risk taking chances with their learning. All participants mentioned how persistence of routine helped develop independent learners and also mentioned how that routine helped students feel confident as learners and members of the classroom. Several of the participants talked about democracy in the classroom, and having the students vote on issues as well as having a lot of choice in learning activities. I believe many of these six classrooms are run as a democratic space with the students having a lot of

independence and choices in learning and other activities. This also demonstrates respect of the individual student as a human being as well. They also discussed how they spent a lot of time thinking about learning activities that would engage their students as well as employing many teaching strategies that empowered students and helped them become independent and creative thinkers and learners. For a complete listing of the themes generated from the interviews, please see Appendix A, Tables 2 and 3. I suggest that the above mentioned concepts and strategies of building toward independent learners, creating a democratic society within the classroom and honouring the students' backgrounds as well as honouring the students' life experiences show deep respect for every student as the unique, important and contributing human being each is. These are the crucial differences which make these teachers stand out as exemplary educators and this in turn helps the students learn because they can see that someone – their teacher – really cares about and respects them, and their classrooms truly are inviting and deeply respectful to all students.

In comparison, we can see that the above mentioned classrooms look and sound a lot different than the previous classrooms we visited under the direction of Miss Goodheart, Mrs. Bossey and Mr. Dampour. Although these teachers did mention routine, it was routine established to control the students rather than a democratic routine that established a dynamic allowing the students to experience greater independence. Also, although two participants mentioned using ability-based groupings in their classroom, I strongly suggest these groupings are different and do lead to student learning. Not only did the participants talk about groupings, they talked more about targeting student instructional needs in order to help students grow. They also talked a lot about daily, on-going assessment through observations and conversations with the students, as well as some testing in order to move students higher up. These teachers mentioned that their groups were always changing and never stayed the same for very long. This is in contrast to the more traditional kind of group learning where a bluebird

was a bluebird for life in reading groups and the crow was always a crow at the bottom of the class, with no chance of advancement.

I suggest that the six enlightened teachers think very differently about their students and their roles as educators, not only in community schools, but in every teaching situation they encounter. In chapter five I will examine a little more closely, what these teachers are doing to help disrupt the dominant, Euro-Centric discourse so prevalent in our community schools. I will also consider ways to help make changes for the students of Community Schools.

Chapter Five

Coming to Conclusions and Asking More Questions

In the last chapter, we looked at six portraits depicting the lives, minds and classrooms of teachers who have figured out how to work authentically with all of the students in their classes. In this chapter I will discuss the findings from the interviews – the teacher beliefs and practices they had in common. I also need to address the discussion each teacher had on the importance of books and reading within the classrooms, as I feel this deserves a separate place on which to report and remark. The final part will describe what I have come to call soul-defining moments, or soul-to-soul teaching and connections, which I believe is essential to building authentic, genuine relationships with students and will eventually lead to students beginning to take risks with their learning, becoming engaged and hopefully lead to academic success.

As I interviewed each participant I audio-taped the session and then transcribed it. Once I had interviewed all of the participants, and finished the transcriptions, I began to read them over again. I was very excited about what the teachers had reported, and the information they had shared with me and I began to notice that there were many common themes running through the interviews.

Themes

As I read the transcripts, I was excited to see that common themes and statements were in evidence. I wanted to know what the teachers said or did that was the same or similar in their teaching practices, procedures and beliefs. I also wanted to see if there was evidence supported in the research to which the participating teachers espoused. Below is a chart showing this evidence.

Table 1

Evidence from Participants' Interviews	Connection to Research
Built relationships with students	Valencia, 2010; Freire, 2009; Cowhey, 2006
Honoured students and parents - meeting them where they were at and building	Oakes; 1985; Palmer, 2007; Cowhey, 2006; Valencia, 2010
Set high expectations	Oakes; 1985; Palmer, 2007
Worked toward student independence	Oakes, 1985; Palmer, 2007; Allington & Cunningham, 1999
Created a safe and caring climate in the classroom	Oakes, 1985; Palmer, 2007; Cowhey, 2006
Helped and encouraged students to take risks in learning	Oakes; 1985; Palmer, 2007
Were persistent in teaching student routines	Cowhey, 2006; Allington & Cunningham, 1999
Were persistent in working toward mastering student routines and procedures	Cowhey, 2006; Allington & Cunningham, 1999
Built a community of learners in their classrooms	Oakes, 1985; Palmer, 2007; Kincheloe, 2008; Cowhey, 2006; Valencia, 2010
Worked at thinking creatively (outside of the box) to find ways to engage students and/or find ways to help students learn specific concepts	Oakes; 1985; Palmer, 2007; Kincheloe, 2008; Cowhey, 2006
Celebrated student success	Oakes; 1985; Cowhey, 2006 Allington & Cunningham, 1999
Reflected regularly on their practice and on their relationships with their students	Palmer, 2007; Cowhey, 2006
Modeled for students	Cowhey, 2006; Allington & Cunningham, 1999
Scaffolded learning	Oakes; 1985; Cowhey, 2006; Allington & Cunningham, 1999
Used smaller tasks or mini-steps toward a bigger outcome	Oakes; 1985; Cowhey, 2006; Allington & Cunningham, 1999
Used continuous and on-going assessment to plan instruction	Allington & Cunningham, 1999
Co-taught and collaborated with other teachers	Palmer, 2007; Cowhey, 2006
Books and class discussions vital to instruction	Cowhey, 2006; Galda, 1998; McDaniel, 2004; Allington & Cunningham, 1999
Integrated content areas as much as possible	Cowhey, 2006; Allington & Cunningham, 1999
Used authentic, relevant teaching tasks	Oakes, 1985; Palmer, 2007; Kincheloe, 2008; Cowhey, 2006; Valencia, 2010
Gave rationale and purpose for tasks	Oakes; 1985; Cowhey, 2006
Worked actively toward empowerment and engagement of students	Oakes, 1985; Kincheloe, 2008; Cowhey, 2006; Valencia, 2010; Sleeter, 1991
Taught toward Social Justice, Anti-Race Education, Multi-Culturalism and Critical Pedagogy	Kincheloe, 2008; Freire, 2009; Cowhey, 2006; Valencia, 2010; St. Denis, 2008; St. Denis, 2007; Sleeter, 1991

As we can see, there is much research to support the kinds of thinking, planning and learning experiences the teachers created and carried out in their classrooms. So we can see that good teaching practices, procedures and planning are happening in these classrooms, and this encourages engagement and academic student success, as well as helps students learn to think independently. Oakes et al (2013) argue that “most school cultures foster the belief that although some students can and will learn very well, many will not, and that anything else would be abnormal” (p. 265). The participating teachers have said that every student in their care has a right to excellent education, and every teacher has the responsibility of making quality instruction the norm. These educators have adopted a culture in their classroom, which hopefully will transfer to the whole school. “Good schools have cultures where it makes sense for faculty to teach all students well and for all students to learn well” (p. 262). In my experience, in community schools, good quality teachers with strong teaching practices are not the norm.

Community schools continue to be staffed by inexperienced teachers and administrators. Often brand new teachers are placed in these challenging schools and are given little or no training or understanding of the added pressures and stresses being place upon them. I have also noticed that the transiency of teaching staff is often high as well, especially for the administrators. Perhaps community schools are used as places where the administration and teaching staff can get some experience before moving on to ‘better’ placements. As a result of new teaching staff and administration and a high transfer rate, it is hard to build consistency in community schools, and to keep important learning procedures and targets in place for our most disadvantaged populations. The question remains, how can we improve quality education in our community schools?

Oakes (2013) and her fellow researchers explore the idea of press for change: “Press refers to the influence of a cultural imperative or a social consensus. It suggests an inevitability that each

member of a society, a group, or an institution will be immersed in, and thus *pressed* by, particular cultural values” (p. 262). This press, or influence can be positive or negative, and the participating teachers have figured out and teach to social justice and diversity by teaching and encouraging their students to question things in their world. School and classroom cultures can “press students to behave in characteristic ways, and if a school’s culture is strong enough, it can press students in ways that counter some of the broader culture’s influence” (p. 263). We have seen, through research that in community schools the press is to conform to Dominant Thinking patterns that continue to marginalize First Nation, Inuit, Metis and New Canadian students. We need more quality educators like the participating teachers to push against societal norms and begin to dismantle and deconstruct Dominant Thinking in the classroom.

As suggested earlier, many teachers in inner city and community schools lack experience, but sometimes there is another reason why teachers may be placed in these schools:

All students at a school – not just the highest –achieving ones – need access to excellent educators. A not-so-well-kept secret in many school cultures is that teachers are tracked much like students. The most-experienced and knowledgeable teachers are often rewarded with the ‘plum’ teaching assignments. (Oakes et al, 2013, p. 269)

It is common practice to place new teachers and new administrators in our most needy schools. It is also the norm to rotate the teachers and administrators in and out of community schools so that every few years almost the entire teaching staff changes. Another common practice is to leave marginal teachers in community schools where parents are not likely to complain about the mediocre or worse education their children are acquiring. What does this say about our beliefs about the children attending community schools? What does this have to say about consistent practice? How does this help our most needy students? In instances such as these, which are quite commonplace, racism and

continued Dominant Thinking permeates these schools and offers up less than quality education to the students. As stated earlier, every student deserves the best educational experiences available, and this includes having the best teachers and most experienced administrators in our community schools. This includes teachers who have strong instructional practices such as inquiry.

Inquiry as a way of teaching, for the students, as well as for the educators themselves, has many positive benefits for all. Inquiry teaches students to have inquiring minds, to delve into life and world issues and to think critically about the world and society. From my experience, students get excited about inquiry. They love asking questions and then actively searching to find the answers. They are motivated to share their findings and often inquiry leads to social justice actions that empower the students. For example, a couple of years ago I was teaching middle years students in a community school. We were exploring mammals and habitats and as part of the research I sent the students to use the computers in the library to search several animal websites. When they came back to report and share their findings, one group of students had found a website which collected data and information on the poaching of elephants. The students were so engaged in this website and indignant that poachers would kill elephants just for their tusks. The information mentioned that an organization had been set up to help adopt the baby elephants that were orphaned because of the poachers.

The students decided then and there that as a class, we needed to raise money to adopt a baby elephant. (This had not been part of my teaching plan!) The cost was two hundred and fifty dollars to adopt a baby elephant for one year. Looking for any way to motivate and excite the students about learning, I jumped onboard with the students, but left all of the decision-making and problem-solving up to them. I merely asked the questions, like, how will we raise the money? They decided we should ask for some donations from local businesses and hold a raffle and bake sale at the upcoming Parents' Night. We needed to ask permission from the principal, I reminded the students. They decided to send

a small delegation down to talk to her. They chose their team by pointing out who were the best talkers and could convince her. (I talked to her ahead of time, naturally, wanting her to say yes.)

The delegation came back with the good news. What next? I asked the students. They decided we needed posters announcing the event as well as a newsletter item. They chose among themselves who would write the newsletter article and create the posters. I suggested they choose a few students to write a thank you letter to the principal, and they did.

For the bake sale, knowing that parents would not likely be able to contribute a lot, I suggested that as a class, we make several items together. This gave the students cooking opportunities, a chance to find and read recipes that would be easy to prepare, a chance to measure, mix and bake and then price things as well. Every decision we made was made as a class. There was much discussion around what to make and how much to charge. We voted on everything.

In the end, we raised three hundred and six dollars. The students were ecstatic. They were so proud of themselves, and they had learned so much about life experiences like how to organize for action and how to help make a difference, in this case, in the life of a baby elephant. Most importantly, I think they learned that they did have some power to do good in the world. They learned what Social Justice is all about and it empowered them.

The really exciting thing for me was that the students were so excited and determined to raise the money they would do anything and learn anything if I could show them that it would lead them to saving the elephant. When they needed to write a newsletter article, they asked how. When they needed to write thank you letters and/or letters to ask for donations, they were eager to learn. They did not even realize they were learning, it was just a stepping stone to reach their goal. On a more curricular side, they also learned a lot about elephants because they begged to do more research. They loved writing about what they learned and even enjoyed sharing it with one another and with anyone

who would listen! Through inquiry, students begin to see that what they think and how they feel matters – that sometimes they can make a difference in their world by writing letters, creating and signing petitions and taking issues outside of their school into the community.

Oakes et al (2013) suggest that:

A productive school culture requires teachers who have the willingness, skills, and opportunities to continually examine every aspect of their teaching. This inquiry goes beyond the familiar search for ‘what works’ to make conventional school practice ‘better.’ It is an inquiry that mirrors the teacher’s own sociocultural teaching. Just as students focus on issues that are important to them, teachers’ inquiry focuses on their professional life, including their underlying beliefs and their understanding of school values. (p. 287)

Inquiry, for both teachers and students is an essential tool which helps press against Dominant discourse and is a prime example of what Haberman (2010) calls exemplary teaching.

Teaching for Social Justice and using multicultural education in a productive manner is of key importance. I believe that the six participants for the study worked hard to empower students by exploring cultural backgrounds of the students in a way that was welcoming and honouring. Even though some of the participants talk about the dinner-dress-dance kind of multiculturalism Sleeter (1991) addresses as a low-level or beginning model, I believe these teachers moved past this very quickly and did embrace the power of multicultural education. These teachers believed that “students might bring with them to the classroom prior learning from outside school, motives, goals, insights, strategies from learning, or personal identities that give direction to their growth” (Sleeter, 1991, p. 5). The teachers used the strengths the students brought to the classroom to enhance their own instruction and to build a strong learning community that fostered respect for everyone.

A Closer Look At Haberman's Concept of 'Exemplary' Teaching

As mentioned earlier, Haberman (2010) asks, "Is it possible to describe a teaching approach that can serve as an alternative to the pedagogy of poverty?" (p. 5). He goes on to list several criteria of what good teaching looks like in urban classrooms: students involved with explanations of human differences; students being taught major concepts, big ideas and general principles; students involved in the planning of their learning; students involved in such ideas as fairness, equity and/or justice in the world; students are active learners; students directly involved in real-life experiences; students involved in heterogeneous groups, both culturally and intellectually; students question widely accepted assumptions about the world; students involved in polishing and perfecting their work; students involved with technology and the access of information via internet; and students involved in reflecting on their own lives (Haberman, 2010, p.5).

If we pause and reflect back to what the participating teachers discussed, we will see that many, if not all of these points were mentioned, but let us look at just one of Haberman's criteria and search for evidence among the teacher's responses. "Whenever students are involved with issues they regard as vital concerns, good teaching is going on (Haberman, 2010, p. 5).

Carmen's Classroom

The students really care about what they're learning and Carmen sees it as a priority to help them be passionate about topics. "It was the way we approached it from the beginning," she says, adding that a lot of thought goes into how to provide issues that students care about. In this case, Carmen is talking about how she and the students looked at UNICEF'S Children's Bill of Rights in her grade three class. They studied the bill and then the children had to rewrite it in their own words. This, Carmen feels helped make them passionate. They then studied countries around the world and

compared the Bill of Rights with the treatment of children. The children cared “because they’re kids, too.” It was important to them to look at vital issues for all children.

Brooke’s Classroom

Brooke approaches it in a different way, through whole class discussion. Any issue is always discussed and solutions agreed upon by the whole class. Brooke talks about how assignment deadlines can often become an issue. “We’d talk about it and they would throw out ideas and we’d come up with our own solution. I never took marks off – I never had penalties. There was always a reason somebody didn’t get something handed in.” Brooke believes that treating the students with the utmost respect and allowing their input into what happens to them in their lives in the classroom is what good teaching is about.

Curtis-Dean’s Classroom

Curtis-Dean believes it is about relevancy and real life issues that allow students to be motivated and passionate. He talks about some of his class assignments, one in particular, where “The students went downtown to photograph anything and everything they thought as something that should be replicated in this north downtown development. And then they put together a presentation to send off to this architecture firm. Those photos and their story and their ideas will be used in some of the publications of the architecture firm as they go forward with the developing of the north downtown area.” This made the lessons authentic and vital to the students – they were making some decisions that would affect their city in the future.

Sheila’s Classroom

Sheila really focuses on learning about their families and then finding literature to support the families. “I’ve really felt that that has sort of opened up their engagement, but also they’re able to make connections with what we’re doing, and to link what they do and know to their own families.”

Because so many of her students' families are New Canadians, this is of vital concern to them and they have much to share about their own cultures and backgrounds. When Sheila focuses on family diversity, the students feel that they have something worth contributing. They feel that they are important members of their community of learners.

Curtis Taylor's Classroom

Curtis found that learning about Indigenous people and comparing it to European culture and then applying the knowledge to his teaching really helped make things relevant to his students. "And the kids, because they started really engaging and understanding how nature and First Nations people, especially, are tied together, and how other cultures and the European culture weren't quite that tied to nature – they became true learners." These were real issues that were of concern in his students' lives.

Samantha's Classroom

Samantha found that the social justice piece just naturally fell into place for her and the students and it became the vital issue of concern that motivated and impassioned the whole class. "We were doing an inquiry unit on elephants, and we came across some video footage of elephants being shot for their tusks. The students got very upset about that. Then we came upon another site that was for adopting baby elephants whose mothers had been killed by poachers. The students decided, on their own, that we needed to learn more about elephants, and fund-raise to adopt a baby elephant. These students became so focused and engaged on their goals that they didn't even realize how much learning they were doing.

So, we can see that each of the participating teachers, in their own way, have found avenues and means to bring crucial issues into the classroom, through curricular connections and that this in turn, motivates and empowers their students to be passionate about what they are learning. I could go on with all 12 points Haberman (2010) makes about good teaching. In each case several, if not all of the

participants would be represented in each point. But even Haberman himself points out, “Taken individually, any of these indicators of good teaching is not a sufficient basis for proposing reform. We all know teachers who have done some of these things – as well as other, better things – for years” (p. 6). The participants are doing amazing and wonderful things in their classrooms, with their students and they are making changes but I believe there is something more happening.

AHA Moments

As I read and reread the transcripts, five subtle but important points stuck out for me with all the teacher-participants. Perhaps this is part of what really helps these teachers begin to make a strong difference in their classrooms.

The first was the overwhelming need to genuinely get to know their students, up close and personal – soul-to-soul. There was nothing superficial or phony about the way each teacher talked about bonding and building genuine relationships with their students. Brooke says, “I was really, truly interested in them and their families.” Several of the participants went out of their way to make sure this was happening. In doing this, the teachers went that extra mile for the students. Although Oakes (1985) speaks of developing a caring climate within the classroom, I don’t think she goes to quite the extent that these teachers do in developing relationships.

The second thing I found was the high respect for the students the teachers discussed and/or showed through their actions. They treated the students as people, not just subjects to be taught. Curtis observed, “It gave a name and face and identities and we started to get to know students in a way which wasn’t just students in a desk.”

The third observation I made is how the teachers talked about the need to persist in establishing routines, even when the students pushed back against them. Somehow the teachers knew that what they were doing was important enough to keep going with it, for the students’ own welfare. These

teachers did not let the students control and/or manipulate them, as Haberman (2010) mentions by acting out against the teachers. These teachers had the foresight and perhaps were self-reflective enough to see that what they wanted to do with their students was for the good of all and they persisted until the students began to comply.

The fourth observation I made is the number of teachers who talked about reflecting, learning and growing from their students and the things that happened in class. Carmen comments, “I’m not afraid to ask the students, ‘What did I do – if I have a bad lesson, I’ll say, here’s how I planned this and here’s what I was thinking, but WOW, that kind of went wrong. What should I have done differently, and why did you guys not like that?’ I’m not afraid to show the kids that I’m thinking about it, either.”

The fifth observation I made is that a number of the participants discussed having a ‘moment’ – perhaps an epiphany, although I will call it a soul-defining moment or a soul-to-soul connection with their students or because of their students. This is a moment that changes their lives and often changes the way they teach. Perhaps it is the moment of connectedness Palmer (2007) speaks of, but I think it is more than this. They are brief glimpses that allow us to actually see our students as human beings and not by the colour of their skin or the score on their reading assessments. These soul-defining moments change our way of looking at our students, if we let them.

Carmen speaks of getting very real with her students by asking, sincerely, for their feedback, knowing that she will try to change and do things differently next time. These are soul-defining times and moments for her. Brooke speaks of such a soul-defining moment as well. Both involved parents who made her think differently about things. When asked why she did not attend the parent-teacher conferences, a mother told Brooke, “With my older kids, the teachers always told me what they were doing wrong. I don’t want to sit and listen to the things I need to do better with my younger kids.” In

Brooke's words, "And I thought, well, how much of what she's saying is true?" It made Brooke really question how teachers do things. "We put ourselves on a little bit of a hierarchy."

Curtis reminisces of a moment that actually changed the way he taught, when a student confronted him and accused him of not caring, on a personal level, about the young people sitting in the desks in his classroom. Curtis says, "And I still remember that today." This tells you it was powerful and impactful for Curtis – a life-changing, soul-to-soul moment in his life.

Answering the Research Question

I began with the following research question:

How can teachers begin to deconstruct Euro-Centric, White Dominant beliefs, practices, attitudes and expectations in order positively impact *all students* and their academic well-being?

We can see that many teachers are deconstructing and dismantling Euro-Centric beliefs and practices using several ways and means including building genuine and meaningful relationships with students. They work to empower students by engaging them in authentic learning experiences, providing students choice in many different areas which offers autonomy. They use group work and group discussions to foster critical thinking. They work toward Social Justice by confronting issues head-on in their classrooms. It is heartwarming to see the many ways teachers are working to disrupt Dominant Culture. However, having small pockets of teachers doing this, no matter how good their work is, or how strongly they advocate for their students – is not enough. What else can be done?

Implications for Education

The Teacher-Participants Weigh In

One of the reasons for conducting this research was to find out what ideas the teachers might have for helping other teachers begin to teach in more empowering and engaging ways. Here, we

return to portraiture, where I take each participant's response to question seven and weave it into a look at their teaching, their classrooms and their students.

1. Question Seven – Knowing that an educator's goal is to successfully reach and successfully teach ALL students, what ideas and suggestions do you have that might help other teachers?

Carmen's Classroom

In Carmen's classroom respectful interactions is at the forefront of her instruction. Carmen spends the time needed to ensure that her students know what this means and how to do it. She feels that students learn best by discussing things with one another, since each student comes into the classroom with a vast hold of background knowledge and previous experience to share. Carmen makes sure to encourage each student to share so that they feel they are contributing and important members of the learning community.

In order to accomplish this, Carmen spends a lot of time carefully planning meaningful learning experiences for her students. She starts with the big ideas, putting much of her hard work up front. "Plan wisely, I would just say, and be prepared to work hard in that planning and in that thinking stage." This can take a lot of time, but she finds that it's worth it for her and her students. "Figure out how to choose wisely, the types of activities and the types of learning experiences – or I would call them challenges – that would engage your students in meaningful learning that would build on that big idea." Carmen also uses inquiry a lot in her classroom. She finds that through inquiry, students naturally ask questions, are curious about issues and want to read and research to find the answers. She also tries to integrate content areas as often as possible, which is why planning is so important. As well, Carmen uses the backward by design planning method, focusing first on what she wants her students to accomplish and then figuring out how to accomplish while staying fixed on the

curricular outcomes of the unit. She always thinks, “At the end of the day, what do I really need my students to take away?”

Sometimes Carmen thinks it might be easier to just give her students workbook pages, or just stick to the textbook, since sometimes it takes a lot of time and energy to plan, and she does not always feel that she has that energy or time. “I thought, my life would be so easy, if I used worksheets, but at the end of the day, I know my students’ engagement would be less. And in the end I’ll end up having to work a lot harder, because if the students aren’t engaged then I’m spending all of my time managing them.”

One thing Carmen prides herself on is the fact that she can motivate and engage her students in authentic ways and with real life learning tasks, which helps her with class management. She comments: “I know my students will learn and be more engaged, and actually care about what they’re learning, if I can focus on those big ideas, versus the pre-designed textbooks and worksheets.” When her students are actively engaged in their learning, they have no time or reason to be off-task, and it’s exciting to witness this happen time and again. Sometimes the tasks Carmen chooses are challenging for her students. She finds ways to break them down into mini-challenges. Even though the tasks are difficult, Carmen knows her students enjoy that sense of accomplishment. “You follow the lead of your students,” she says. “And at the same time it helps you to think about what are the different learning pieces that need to be scaffolded.”

Carmen also knows the value of co-teaching, and works as much as possible with another teacher. She knows that it’s easier planning with two – the ideas because more creative and exciting, and with two teachers to share the work it seems easier. It also helps with assessment as well, because like most of the other participants in this research, Carmen co-constructs criteria with her students for the assignments and then together they create a rubric. As well, she models instruction and provides

samples of the assignments that help students know and understand the learning tasks. Very often, the students self-assess and can tell Carmen where they are on the rubric and what they need to do to improve.

Reflecting and growing from each teaching experience is something Carmen insists on and she finds that reflecting with her teaching partner and her students is very helpful for her. She also loves to help the students celebrate their successes, whether they do it for one another, at a school assembly or at a staff meeting. Sharing teaching successes are important as well, and Carmen loves to walk across the hall to share with another classroom teacher what her students have accomplished on a particular day. Carmen feels that teachers don't celebrate their students' successes enough, and she tries to model this as much as possible.

Life in Carmen's classroom is exciting, varied, noisy and busy. It is sometimes difficult for the students, but with scaffolding, the students succeed and enjoy that boost of confidence that comes from success. Students know they are capable of learning in Carmen's classroom, and they enjoy contributing and sharing as equal members of the learning community, no matter what their background. In Carmen's classroom learning is enjoyable.

Brooke's Classroom

In Brooke's classroom, it is vitally important to her that she really bonds with her students and their parents. She wants to make sure that she provides the very best education she can to the children. Deeply committed to this goal, Brooke targets and individualizes instruction to her students' needs, which she does by building strong relationships with the children. It is important to her that she not only get to know her students, but also that she finds something to love about each one of them. She also spends a lot of time helping the students bond with one another so that the classroom can become a learning community. This includes working on being respectful, having respectful interactions and

everyone treating everyone with dignity. This means the classroom is a caring place for her students, which Brooke sees as essential. “I also think they need to know that your classroom is a safe place for everybody.”

Brooke makes sure to elicit and use the students’ ideas and suggestions for classroom management. She knows that this helps the students to ‘buy in’ to the conduct of the class. She also takes the time and energy to solve problems in the classroom and on the playground, as a whole class. This helps everyone take ownership of the problems and lets everyone know that their issues are as important as anyone else’s.

Brooke makes sure to let her students see that she is a learner too, and that they are all learning all the time. She also wants them to understand that it is alright to make mistakes and to learn from them, and that as a class, they will all work together to accomplish things. Brooke shows that there is no stigma attached to offering extra help, or scaffolded learning to those in need. She points out that everyone needs help at some point, with at different times, with different subjects. “We can’t expect our kids to become an expert in things, and take risks and make mistakes when we never make it okay to do that.”

In Brooke’s classroom, students spend a lot of time reflecting on what they’ve heard, seen or read. They discuss, they think and they write in their journals. Journaling is an important teaching strategy which Brooke uses to help students consolidate new knowledge and to bring new understanding to issues. Brooke also reads aloud a lot and makes sure to discuss difficult issues in class. When there is a problem in completing assignments or meeting a deadline, the whole class is involved in solving the problem. The issue is discussed and the students suggest the solutions. In this way, Brooke feels that the issues and solutions belong to everyone in the class and this helps with the cohesive feeling in their classroom.

For Brooke, assessment is about creatively helping the students to show what they know. As much as possible, Brooke avoids standardized types of assessments, including exams, which force students to think and respond in only one modality. It is important for Brooke that her students find their own ways of sharing their new knowledge, and she works hard to help them be creative in this way. “You need a mix of assessments and a mix of projects and a mix of opportunities for kids to shine.” Brooke looks at assessment as a way of celebrating learning and helping students find ways to be proud of what they know.

Collaboration for Brooke is very important, as well as searching out help and support if you need it, as a teacher. She sees this as strength in teachers and makes a point of offering and getting help when it is needed. This includes support from other teachers, from administrations and from the community at large. Brooke knows that she is not an expert in many areas and enjoys learning from other people. Along with this, reflection is an important part of learning and growing to be a better teacher. For Brooke, knowing her strengths and weaknesses and working on them help make her the best teacher she can be for her students.

Curtis-Dean’s Classroom

For Curtis-Dean, authentic teaching, using real-life situations as much as possible, along with inquiry are a must in his classroom. In planning units and for assignments, he spends a lot of time thinking about the reason or purpose behind it. It is essential to him that he be able to explain to his students the relevancy of a task. “I believe in looking at the purpose of everything the students are doing.”

He runs his classroom like a democracy, working diligently to take his students’ opinions, ideas and suggestions into consideration in any teaching or classroom situation. He knows that this is why his students are so engaged and motivated. He searches out real life situations for his students to

inquire into and make decisions about. They have been involved in making petitions, writing letters to city hall, and local environmental activities. Curtis-Dean believes this is what helps make his students good global citizens now and in the future.

Curtis-Dean allows his students much freedom in their assignments. He wants the students to be creative in how they present things in class, and he encourages his students to try different ways of presenting. In this way, the diversity of students is taken into consideration and “differences are celebrated and different strengths are brought out.” This helps the students when “you give them a variety of ways of shining so that each can find that comfort zone where they are for that moment.”

Curtis-Dean also knows that sometimes you have to push students out of the comfort zone in order to help them grow, but this is done in the context of a safe classroom after much discussion and bonding has taken place. Over the course of the year, Curtis-Dean works to have each student take on a bit of leadership role so that “they are looked at as the leader” for a particular situation. When asked how he gets everyone to participate in this, Curtis-Dean replies that by the end of the year, the classroom has become a safe place and the students will take these risks knowing they have their classmates’ respect and support.

Right from the start, the students know how they will be assessed because they have already had a discussion and agreed upon what the assessment will look like. They also develop rubrics as a class, so that students can target their own learning needs. In a lot of cases, the students self and peer assess first before Curtis-Dean sees the final products. With rubrics and co-constructing criteria, the assessment is truly based on the students’ work.

Group work, discussion and real-life teaching situations are all a large part of Curtis-Dean’s teaching practice. He believes that the best learning happens when these three things are in play. So Curtis-Dean’s classroom is a busy, noisy, active and happy place. Students are engaged in authentic

learning situations which translates into real-life scenarios. “Students are there finding out answers to questions for authentic reasons.” They work a lot in groups and have class discussions on a daily basis, making decisions together about how they are going to go about tackling learning tasks, how they will share their new knowledge and how they will assess them at the end.

Sheila’s Classroom

In Sheila’s classroom, the students learn to work in groups through much modelling, practicing, and persistence of routines. Once routines are in place, Sheila feels that the learning really begins. It is important for Sheila to establish routines at the beginning of the school year and to revisit them often, as she regularly gets new students in her classroom. She also feels that it is necessary to get to know the students and their families as that she can provide strong instruction.

Through persistence and modeling, Sheila works toward independence for her students. She knows that routine helps establish independence, and through independence students gain confidence and feel successful. Sheila feels that establishing routines makes the students feel comfortable because, even if they cannot speak English well, they know what their jobs are and how to accomplish them. This makes the students feel good about themselves that in turn helps them gain confidence. They are also more willing to take risks in learning, like reading to a partner, speaking out in class, and practicing pronouncing words they are learning. She also knows that “creating a classroom environment to support students and to encourage them to take risks” is an essential ingredient in her classroom.

The students love the feeling of independence. They know how to do the tasks they need to accomplish, since Sheila has modeled for them. They show confidence by teaching other students who have been away, how to do the tasks. The students take pride in this and in doing their jobs.

Classroom management is not often an issue because the students are engaged in their tasks and in learning.

Sheila uses a block Language Arts formation in which the students have a specified number of minutes every morning to be involved in reading trade books, writing about the connections they make to the books and/or their life experiences, word study, which involves many of the words from their trade books and listening to reading. Assessment-based instruction is very important to Sheila and she uses various assessments, both standardized and formative, to drive her instruction. “I think the most important thing is just looking at work samples, assessment and evidence all the time, and at the end of the day, thinking where to go next.”

Sheila bases her instruction on “observing students all the time, taking notes, making check lists, looking at work samples and reflecting on what they couldn’t and couldn’t do.” From this, Sheila groups her students in fluid groups that change on a daily basis according to student learning needs. She feels that having students work at their own level is an important part of their success. As the students learn, the groupings change so that a student is never stuck in a group, as happens in Oakes (1985) concept of streaming students. She calls using worksheets and assigned textbooks, ‘blanket instruction’ and says, “You’re not looking at the needs of the students’ if your instruction revolves around these things. Sheila’s class is a vibrant, noisy and busy place where students work at their own level and at their own pace in a caring, safe environment.

Curtis Taylor’s Classroom

Curtis works hard to let students know that he really cares about them. His practice is to stand at his classroom door to greet the students as they enter the room. He feels this practice helps put students at ease, it allows him to see who might need a little extra encouragement that day, and he feels that it validates each student as an important human being. Curtis also makes a point of hearing his

students. He listens to them and whenever possible, he heeds the suggestions they give him. He understands that they are growing people – teenagers who will sometimes be rude and say some disrespectful things. He says that in his job as a high school teacher he is “developing people into independent learners.”

One way that Curtis works toward student independence is through routine and persistence. He feels that this helps students feel comfortable and safe in the classroom. “I get their trust,” he says, “by being predictable, by being consistent, by not stepping on any toes.” Through this, he feels that he also builds a community of learners with his students, which includes building their independence. “When you build a community of learners you’re building independence so that students are not dependent upon you as a teacher.” Curtis sees this as helping students feel confident about themselves as learners.

It is always important to Curtis to be in tune with his students’ needs. He observes and assesses as he works in the classroom and he melds his lesson plans accordingly. He says, “Lesson plans are malleable.” In this way, Curtis meets the needs of his students. He scaffolds their learning, models for them and finds other, creative ways of teaching them so that they really understand the concepts they need to learn. He says, “You have to be a partner with them” to help them learn how to be successful and gain confidence in themselves.

Curtis also believes in using dialogues and discussions in the classroom and being honest with the students on controversial topics. He feels that this is a sign of respect, by offering respectful interaction. By showing the students respect, they will be respectful, as well. This is important to Curtis because he often does things differently than other high school teachers in his community school, such as working in the hallways, taking the students outside to work or taking them on a learning trip. He chooses to do these things because he knows that the best learning often takes place

outside of the classroom in the real world. Curtis is creative as he responds to his students' needs and thinks about how he will help them succeed in his classroom.

Samantha's Classroom

Sam believes that modeling is an important aspect in her classroom. She models respect for all of her students, and models being excited about learning new things. Her mantra is, "be happy and excited about learning, yourself. Model that and your students will be excited, too." She also believes that offering choice as much as possible and involving students through class discussions, to weigh in on any decision making and problem solving are signs of respect as well and she endeavours to do this.

Sam begins each year by building a community of learners in her classroom. She does this by learning about each of her students and their families. She encourages the students to talk about themselves in pairs, small groups and in whole class discussions. She also brings the newspaper into the classroom, shares current events and has discussions around tough social issues like poverty and injustice. She also helps make the students responsible for their own behaviour by co-constructing what good learning looks like in the class. For Sam, "this immediately begins to empower the students to take control of their own behaviour and learning."

In order to excite students about learning, Sam reads aloud in class, often. She chooses novels, short stories, newspaper articles, excerpts of articles, and non-fiction pieces which fit into curricula content. By reading, she hopes to help build students' background knowledge and make them curious about the topic. She finds that students are naturally curious and they begin to ask questions. This is the way she begins the inquiry units she teaches. She finds that students most often enjoy inquiry learning and finding the answers to their own questions and then sharing the results. Sam believes inquiry "makes learning and writing relevant" to them.

Sam always sets the bar high for all students and then scaffolds their learning. “I believe every student can learn if given enough time, and the right help.” She also makes sure to celebrate student successes, often. She believes that student success and celebrations build confidence. “Students begin to see that they can learn. There is nothing as exciting as seeing a student’s eyes light up when they are proud of what they’ve done! That makes it all worthwhile.” In Sam’s class, teaching is all about making learning attainable for all students.

The participant teachers offer many good, strong ideas of how to engage and empower students and how to begin to deconstruct Dominant Thinking and Euro-Centric practices in the classroom. However, it isn’t enough. In some ways, these teachers are working in a vacuum and they are definitely working against the well-entrenched system that continues to Other and marginalize students.

Comparing Haberman’s (2010) Criteria of Exemplary Teaching With Evidence of Authentic Teaching

As mentioned earlier, Haberman’s criteria of exemplary teachers includes: students involved with explanations of human differences; students being taught major concepts, big ideas and general principles; students involved in the planning of their learning; students involved in such ideas as fairness, equity and/or justice in the world; students as active learners; students directly involved in real-life experiences; students involved in heterogeneous groups, both culturally and intellectually; students who question widely accepted assumptions about the world; students involved in polishing and perfecting their work; students involved with technology and the access of information via internet; and students involved in reflecting on their own lives (Haberman, 2010, p.5). My criteria for selecting participants for this study included looking for evidence through conversations with teachers. I was looking for such things as:

- “I have high expectations for all of my students.” (evidence of believing that all

students can learn)

- “I am always reflecting on how to make my lessons better so that all my students learn.”
(evidence of self-reflection and awareness that it is up to the teacher to find ways to help the students succeed)
- “I scaffold their learning so that all students are successful.” (evidence of believing that all students can learn, if given the support they need)
- “I ask the students what they think they need in order to be successful.” (evidence of building a caring community in which students are a vital part of their own learning)
- “I have the students teach one another, and me...” (evidence of belief that the teacher isn't the fount of knowledge, but shares this responsibility with everyone in the class)
- “We often have discussions around hard topics such as poverty, prejudice, unfairness in the world, etc. I don't shy away from things because they are uncomfortable or controversial” [evidence that the teacher is working toward social justice and pushing the boundaries of White Dominant Culture, and also against Palmer's (2007) *Anatomy of Fear* in teachers]
- “I try to find books and articles to share which make us think about prejudice and unfairness in the world...” (evidence that the teacher is working toward social justice and pushing the boundaries of White Dominant Culture)
- “I ask the students to teach me about their culture and their history; I remind them that I don't know everything, and that we can learn together.” (evidence that the teacher validates the students as unique individuals, each with something to offer in the way of learning in their classroom)

Haberman's (2010) Criteria for Exemplary Teaching	Bishop's Evidence of Authentic Teaching
	"I have high expectations for all of my students" (evidence of believing that all students can learn)
	"I am always reflecting on how to make my lessons better so that all my students learn" (evidence of self-reflection and awareness that it is up to the teacher to find ways to help the students succeed)
Students involved in the planning of their learning Students involved in polishing and perfecting their work	"I scaffold their learning so that all students are successful" (evidence of believing that all students can learn, if given the support they need)
Students involved in reflecting on their own lives Students involved in the planning of their learning Students as active learners	"I ask the students what they think they need in order to be successful" (evidence of building a caring community)
Students involved in heterogeneous groups, both culturally and intellectually Students as active learners Students involved in reflecting on their own lives	"I have the students teach one another, and me" (evidence of the belief that teachers and students are life-long learners)
Students involved with explanations of human differences Students being taught major concepts, big ideas and general principles Students involved in such ideas as fairness, equity and/or justice in the world Students question wide accepted assumptions about the world	"We often have discussions around hard topics such as poverty, prejudice, unfairness in the world, etc. (evidence that the teacher is working toward social justice and pushing the boundaries of White Dominant Culture)
Students involved with explanations of human differences Students being taught major concepts, big ideas and general principles Students involved in such ideas as fairness, equity and/or justice in the world	"I try to find books and articles to share which make us think about prejudice and unfairness in the world" (evidence that the teacher is working toward social justice and pushing the boundaries of White Dominant Culture)
Students as active learners Students involved in reflecting on their own lives	"I ask the students to teach me about their culture and their history" (evidence that the teacher validates the students as unique individuals, each with something to offer in the classroom)

In comparing the above data, I see that my concept of authentic teaching aligns very closely with Haberman's (2010) criteria for exemplary teaching. Although Haberman does not directly address teacher self-reflection or maintaining high expectations for all students, I believe these are implicit in his research and foundational to his work. He speaks of, "teachers who maintain control by

establishing trust and involving their students in meaningful activities” (p. 293). I believe this indicates the need to reflect on teaching practices and to be sensitive to the students’ learning needs. It is evidence that teachers must think about who their students are and understand what their academic needs are as well.

Still More Questions...

It is here that further research needs to be done. Questions which continue to percolate in my mind: Do teachers need to have soul-defining moments, or make soul-to-soul connections in order to finally see their students as the individual people they are? Do other teachers have these soul-to-soul moments and perhaps not reflect upon them in any deep manner which would allow for growth and change?

So, we can see from the interviews with the participants that many good, exemplary things are happening in some of our most struggling and challenging schools. But it is not enough. Researchers, and Haberman (2010) in particular tell us that things will not change in any big way for urban or community schools unless there is total school or system buy in. Haberman (2010) insists, “The whole school faculty and school community – not the individual teacher – must be the unit of change” (p. 4). He also tells us, as the six participants did, that persistence is key in trying to initiate change: “There must be patience and persistence of application, since students can be expected to resist changes to a system they can predict and know how to control” (p. 4). But he also reminds us, “Taken together and practiced school wide, persistently, however, these suggestions can begin to create an alternative to the pedagogy of poverty” (p. 7).

We need whole schools to throw away the ‘tried’ and ‘true’ Euro-Centric ways of teaching that Oakes (1985) reminds us are done, “more or less out of habit stemming from traditions in the school’s

culture” (p. 5). We need to be persistent and determined in our pursuit of equitable education for all people. Haberman tells us, “Education will be seriously reformed only after we move it from a matter of ‘importance’ to a matter of ‘life and death,’ both for society and for the individuals themselves” (p. 7). I believe we are at this point now.

Oakes and her fellow researchers (2013) argue that “Lasting democratic change is possible when people are accountable to each other, express themselves authentically, examine aspects of schooling that are typically taken for granted, and negotiate common understanding that support collective action” (p. 287). We all need to press in ways which dismantle deficit thinking. I suggest that the participating teachers have found ways to do this with their students because they understand that it is crucial to developing good relationships and leads to a cohesive atmosphere.

We must begin to make changes to the way we teach for the betterment of each individual but also for our society as a whole: “Before we can make workers, we must first make people. But people are not made – they are conserved and grown” (Haberman, 2010, p. 7). We are reminded that teachers work together with students, to help them flourish and grow. In speaking of our First Nations, Inuit and Métis students, St. Denis (2008) says it best. In talking about a teacher who was interviewed for the *Hawthorne* Report, the teacher said, “If you treated ‘Indian’ students like people they began to act like people. I think we need to focus more attention on how to help our teachers to treat Aboriginal students like people” (p. 27).

Soul-to-Soul Teaching

At the beginning of this research, I stated my belief that there are at least three enormous, very pervasive issues at play within our educational institutions and within the makeup of our educators which make confronting the low achievement rates of our First Nations, Metis, Inuit and New Canadian students difficult to address. White Dominant culture and blindness to White privilege;

teachers as good and fair-minded and innocent protectors of our youth; and teacher practices, attitudes and procedures which are often Euro-Centric ways of controlling the students. I believe that the teachers I interviewed and have reported on have found ways to be aware of these problems and work against them. This in turn leads to deconstructing deficit thinking in the classroom.

As I interviewed the teachers and read and studied the transcripts, I began to see four strong themes emerging that I believe work together to help deconstruct deficit thinking in the classroom. The first theme is that all of the teachers spoke passionately about getting to know their students, I would say, soul-to-soul. The teachers worked to strip away any kind of societal layers and to remove the masks that work to distance people. They each had to start with themselves and know themselves deeply. In this way, they also had to at least acknowledge White privilege, whether they could name it or not. A couple of the participants spoke of being lucky in life and in actuality they were speaking of how White privilege had helped them succeed.

Several of the participants mentioned the life-changing moments that helped them strip away the layers and finally see their students as human beings. Once this happened, the teachers never looked back but forged on to find ways to meet their students on the same level. The teachers in the study worked diligently to remove their own masks and then to help the students so that they were all working soul-to-soul in the classroom.

I believe this is the start of deconstructing deficit thinking in the classroom because skin colour and cultural diversity cannot be a barrier in the classroom when one is looking on the inside of a person rather than concentrating on the outside. This shows great respect for all students and the great human dignity from which the teachers operated and the great human dignity with which they treated all their students. The result is that it works to dismantle deficit thinking in the classroom. Issues such as

blaming the victim and false ideas that students of colour cannot succeed due to genetic or environmental situations cannot be present in a place where teachers have chosen to look at each child as the unique individual he/she is and to honour that child and the life experiences he and his family bring to the classroom. These teachers see cultural diversity as a benefit and a strength in their classrooms and not as a deficit to be overcome, or as a barrier to student learning.

The deep respect for individuals within the classroom almost naturally lends itself to creating a safe and caring climate that in turn leads to a strong and positive learning community. Palmer (2007) explores the idea that in order to build a community in the classroom, one must first start with her/himself: “Community is an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace, the flowing of personal identity and integrity into the world of relationships” (p.92). All of the participating teachers spoke of the importance of the learning community, and though only one teacher spoke of a democracy within the classroom, evidence from the interviews suggests that all of the teachers worked at this level. Democracy involves great respect for each individual and the teachers understand this. They all value their students’ experiences and backgrounds, they all encourage their students to talk and share in discussions knowing that each child brings important knowledge to the group; and they all take their students’ interests into consideration when planning learning experiences in the classroom.

The teachers spoke of confronting problems and solving issues head-on, and *with* the students instead of avoiding and ignoring the problems or simply laying down the law in an authoritarian manner. They also spoke of trying to wrestle with the larger societal issues of poverty and racism as they came up in class rather than ignoring them. This lends itself to deconstructing deficit thinking because the teachers are working to balance the power within the classroom, thereby showing the students that they too have power.

All of the teachers are progressive in their teaching methods. Many of them spoke of using inquiry as a way of teaching. All of the teachers use group work and discussions in their classes and several of the teachers spoke against traditional kinds of teaching methods such as the use of worksheets as the primary source of instruction. As noted earlier, inquiry can and often does lead the way to Social Justice and Social Action and several of the teachers spoke of trying to make changes in the world, in their community or in their school through some of their inquiry projects. This action speaks volumes to deconstructing deficit thinking in the classroom.

Books and the reading of various materials, fiction and non-fiction are key elements in all of the classrooms. The teachers use books and read alouds as a way of making sure that the students gain knowledge but more than that they try to make sure the students get more than one side of the story. Curtis-Dean speaks of “not just taking the single side of the story” and making sure that his students read and were exposed to multiple perspectives. Indeed, all of the teachers aim to show the students that there is not only a single story (Adichie, 2009) but there are many perspectives and biases from which people write and that the students need to be aware of. This is one way to deconstruct dominant thinking in the classroom.

Choosing the right kind of books – books which bring up world and societal issues are important to use with students. In the case of middle years students, a book such as *Nobody Cries at Bingo* (Dumont, 2011) helps give students a good look at what life on a reserve might be like. It also addresses, in a quiet way, societal problems such as racism and poverty. *The Road to Chlifa* (Marineau, 1992) is another such book which looks at war and injustice in the Middle East as two young people try to find happiness. *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (Boyne, 2008) follows a young German boy to the concentration camps of World War Two, where his father is the commander of the camp. The boy has no concept of what is really happening on the other side of the fence.

Great and thought-provoking literature such as those mentioned above present a second story to that of the dominant discourse. They press against societal norms and expose students to the realities of the world. Teachers, such as these six, who use these kinds of books address the issue of critical literacy (McDaniel, 2004). Critical literacy “encourages readers to adopt a questioning stance and to work toward changing themselves and their worlds” (p. 472). These six teachers know how to use books such as these to illicit discussions. Teachers such as these need to “encourage students to question their worlds, focusing on the use of authentic dialogue, in which educators speak *with*, not *for*, the students (McDaniel, 2004, p. 474, italics original).

The teachers also addressed some of the tougher social issues such a cultural diversity, poverty, racism and bullying through reading and/or read alouds and class discussions. Sleeter (1994) suggests that as white teachers we need to “articulate, examine, question and critique what we know about racism” (p.33). I believe these teachers are doing this, not only for themselves but for their students as they lead discussions on these tough issues. As the teachers explore the cultural diversity of their students in powerful ways, they address some of these issues: “Doing this would strengthen not only multicultural education’s anti-racist stance, but also our own personal efforts to promote racial justice” (Sleeter, 1994, p. 33). This goes a long way to helping deconstruct deficit thinking in the classroom and helps empower students as well. Sleeter argues “education for empowerment also means teaching students how to advocate effectively for themselves as individuals as well as collectively” (p. 6). I suggest that all six of these teachers work toward effectively empowering their students for self-advocacy and for self-efficacy.

The teachers in the study are what Haberman (2010) calls exemplary teachers and more like them are needed, especially in our community schools. The way these teachers run their classrooms and work with their students automatically works to deconstruct dominant discourse. This does not

mean it is easy, although often they made it seem simple and easy. All of the teachers spoke of being persistent in building their routines and procedures which would in turn allow the teachers to run their classrooms in this way and help their students experience being independent and having more freedom. Often the building of routines and procedures could take months but the teachers never gave up and become the authoritarian talking-head kind of teacher that Dewey (1929) speaks of. I suggest that the development of the routines and procedures these teachers use in their classrooms help set the tone for a democratic learning community that benefits all learners no matter their cultural background. This leads to deconstructing deficit thinking in the classroom. These teachers see that working soul-to-soul with their students has a positive impact on their academic lives as students.

Soul-defining moments and teaching soul-to-soul is all about working with people as people for the betterment of all people, no matter the colour of their skin, their economic background, or where they come from. I have always said, “Whoever walks into my classroom, that’s who I teach.” To me this means working heart-to-heart and soul-to-soul with each individual I encounter, putting my best out there every day, finding ways to connect with my students and helping them engage with learning; empowering them to take control of their own self-development. That’s what soul-to-soul teaching is all about – teaching from the heart and soul - to the heart and soul of people, because ultimately, we are all the same, and we all deserve the very best education has to offer.

So, the question remains, how do we encourage more teachers to take the risk – to teach soul-to-soul with their students so that authentic learning happens?

Appendix A

Table 2

Themes Revealed From Participants' Interviews

	Carmen O.	Brooke H.	Curtis-Dean P.	Sheila R.	Curtis T.	Samantha G.
Building relationships	*	*		*	*	*
High expectations	*	*			*	*
Toward student independence	*	*		*	*	*
Persistence of routines	*	*	*	*	*	*
Persistence of teacher practice	*	*		*	*	*
Building learning community	*	*	*	*	*	*
Thinking creatively to engage students	*	*	*	*	*	*
Celebrating student successes	*	*	*	*		*
Reflecting on practice as a way to grow and meet needs	*	*		*	*	*

Table 3

Themes Revealed From Participants' Interviews

	Carmen O.	Brooke H.	Curtis-Dean P.	Sheila R.	Curtis T.	Samantha G.
Scaffolding Learning	*			*		*
Mini-steps to Succeed – breaking it down	*				*	*
Honouring and meeting students where they are at	*	*	*	*	*	*
Using on-going & self-assessment to plan instruction	*	*	*	*		*
Safe caring climate/students take risks	*	*	*	*	*	*
Books and discussions used	*	*	*	*	*	*
Integrating subject areas	*		*	*	*	*
Authentic teaching tasks	*		*	*	*	*
Empowerment & engagement	*	*	*	*	*	*

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